

CHAPTER 2

SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN SIERRA LEONE

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Introduction

Sierra Leone is an appropriate African country for a critical study of security sector reform (SSR) in post-war reconstruction under international tutelage. In the first place, three decades of single party and military rule in the country had undermined professionalism of the security forces, as well as their capacity to ensure state security. This was in part the result of their politicisation and the lack of effective civilian oversight. Secondly, as a country emerging from a horrendous 11-year war, it was not only confronted with serious security challenges, but also had to contend with citizens who mostly lacked confidence in the security forces.

There is also a very serious debate on the nature and type of SSR processes in Sierra Leone. There are those who hold the view that the ongoing SSR process in the country is externally driven with very little local input. If this view is correct, then the viability and sustainability of the process is in great doubt. Finally, the gradual draw-down plan of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in the country requires critical reflections on the ability of the national security forces to assume responsibility for the security of the state and its people.

In this paper Sierra Leone's SSR process is critically examined. The background, initiatives, policies and activities are discussed. The successes and failures of the reform initiatives, especially those programmes under strong international influence and support, are also evaluated.

Background

Sierra Leone is a small West African country with a total landmass of 72 000 square kilometres. It has a population of about 4,5 million people and 18 ethnic groups (Mkannah 1995:4). The country has rich mineral resources including diamonds, gold, iron ore and bauxite. It also boasts the oldest university in West Africa – Fourah Bay College, which opened in 1827.

Sierra Leone is a former British colony and its capital city, Freetown, was at one time the headquarters of British West Africa, then made up of Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

The country gained its independence from Great Britain on 27 April 1961. Sir Milton Margai of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) was its first post-independence prime minister (1961–1964). He was succeeded by his younger brother, Sir Albert Margai, of the same party (1964–1967). The All People's Congress (APC) reigned from 1968 to 1992, first under Siaka Stevens and then under Joseph Saidu Momoh. It was, among other things, APC misrule that precipitated the 1991 rebel war spearheaded by Foday Sankoh of the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF/SL). Long years of APC misrule was terminated by the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) military coup of 1992. The multiparty elections of March 1996 ushered in the SLPP-led government of Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. The war in the country came to an end in January 2002.

At independence in 1961 Sierra Leone inherited security forces that were incapable of meeting post-independence security challenges of a democratic, pluralistic and multi-ethnic country (Gbla 2002:4). The security forces, including the armed forces and the police that were established by the colonial authorities, were essentially tasked to protect British interests. They were required to maintain law and order with a view to preventing rebellion against the colonial administration. Unsurprisingly, the colonial authorities used the security forces as instruments to suppress the colonised people. This was manifested in the use of the forces to violently put down the 1890 Protectorate Uprising and the Hut Tax War of 1898 (Draft National Security Policy Paper for Sierra Leone 2000:7). The immediate post-independence regime of Sir Milton Margai of the SLPP did not do much to make a radical break with the colonial past or the colonial security forces. For example, until 1963 the heads of both the armed forces and the police were British. The regime did not, however, politicise the security forces.

The ascendancy to power of the SLPP regime of Sir Albert and the APC witnessed calculated attempts on the part of political leaders to politicise the security forces in Sierra Leone. Recruitment, appointment and promotions in the military and police were based on political and ethnic connections rather than qualification and merit. The Albert regime even attempted to involve members of the police and the military in the contest for political power as well as to fill their rank and file with their own relatives, friends and cohorts (Gbla 2002:6). Sir Albert elevated David Lansana, a fellow Mende tribesman and his brother-in-law, to the rank of brigadier and force commander.

Under the APC regime of Siaka Stevens (1968–1985) the politicisation and ethnic character of Sierra Leone's security forces intensified. In an attempt to bring the forces firmly under his control and to weaken their strength, Stevens introduced a lax recruitment policy that gave tremendous powers to enlist loyal and faithful people into the police and the military through the card system. This recruitment system attracted a goodly number of semi-literate people from obscure backgrounds into the security forces, which undermined the professionalism of the forces. In 1974 Stevens made the heads of the police and the military members of parliament. The security forces became important players in the country's politics, thus introducing a new era in civil–military relations. As a result of the emphasis on regime rather than state protection, the country's security forces, especially the military, were showered with benefits that included a monthly rice quota. Furthermore, neither the financial transactions nor the budget of the military were subject to the public accounting system. This led to massive corruption, which in turn had a serious impact on professionalism. Lack of discipline in the forces was further diminished by the lack of civilian oversight institutions, and corruption became rife. In sum, the period under review was marked by poorly paid, poorly trained, demoralised and highly politicised security forces.

This situation of authoritarian and predatory politics impacted negatively on the country's security forces in several ways. In the first place, it precipitated the de-institutionalisation of the security forces and the formalisation of violence. During the reign of Siaka Stevens, for example, paramilitary forces such as the Internal Security Unit and the State Security Department were used to suppress political opponents. A classical case was the violence unleashed by these forces on students at Fourah Bay College during a peaceful protest against the government in 1977. The undue political interference into the affairs of the security forces through ethnic and loyalty criteria for appointment and promotion not only undermined efficiency, but also precipitated the breakdown of command and control in the forces. It also contributed to a declining economic environment that had a further negative impact on the security forces. In spite of abundant national resources, post-independent Sierra Leone was characterised mainly by gross economic mismanagement and its consequent economic decline. The impressive economic performance experienced during the first decade after independence in 1961, with a growth rate of nearly 4 per cent per year, gave way to a slower growth rate of 1,5 per cent in the 1970s. By the 1980s, the gross domestic product growth rate was virtually nil and by the end of that decade had turned negative. This situation worsened in 1989 with government's adoption and implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), supported

by the international financial institutions. Although the SAP was designed to achieve substantial private sector-led growth and poverty alleviation, it involved measures – especially with regard to requirements for retrenchment, devaluation and subsidies – which had adverse effects on the country's economy. Unsurprisingly, by 1990, 82 per cent of the country's population were living below the poverty line. In addition, it has consistently been ranked at the bottom of the UN Human Development Index (National Human Development Report 1996:8, 9). This deplorable economic situation, among other things, affected government's capacity to provide comfortable salaries and attractive conditions of service for members of the security forces.

The outbreak of a rebel war in the country in March 1991, spearheaded by Corporal Foday Sankoh of the RUF, also impacted negatively on the security forces. The war brought to the fore the inability of the forces to effectively defend the state and its citizens. In addition, the hasty move on the part of the government to raise a force to confront the rebels saw the infiltration of undisciplined individuals from obscure backgrounds into the armed forces in particular. And finally, the regionalisation of the conflict led to the active involvement of various armed groups and forces from countries like Liberia (National Patriotic Front) and Burkina Faso and from the Nigeria-dominated Ecomog (Economic Community of West African States Ceasefire Monitoring Group) in the conflict. These diverse forces were undisciplined and looting was common. Because of regionalisation of the conflict, regional powers exercised complete control over military and political decisions in their areas of the country (Ero 2003:244).

As was to be expected of an ill-equipped, poorly trained and undisciplined security apparatus, the country was not up to the task of defending the state and its citizens from the rebel attack. As one army commander bluntly put it: 'The army was caught with its pants down' (Dixon-Fyle et al 1998:17).

Members of the security forces, especially the military, connived with the rebels to wreak havoc. This situation led to the coining of derogatory terms such as *sobers* to describe the country's military, meaning soldiers by day and rebels by night. This phenomenon was clearly manifested by the alliance between the RUF and the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) that took power in 1997. These and many other excesses of the military bred mistrust between the citizens and the military which had serious implications for civil-military relations in the country.

The loss of confidence and trust in the military led to the formation of civil defence forces including the Tamaboros, Donsos, Gbethis and Kamajohs,¹

which further damaged civil–military relations. The major objective of these groups was to protect their local communities. However, some of these groups, like the Kamajohs, had strong political connections, which exacerbated the problem, as is illustrated by the fact that the head of the Kamajoh militia group, Sam Hinga Norman, was made deputy minister of defence. The soldiers who seized power in May 1997 even cited the privileged position accorded to the Kamajohs as one of their main reasons for the coup.

The involvement of international actors in Sierra Leone's post-war reconstruction in general – and SSR in particular – was unprecedented. In 1997, soldiers from the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) entered the country in an attempt to enforce peace. Two years later the United Nations took over, and deployed 17 500 peacekeepers drawn from various countries. The British were also very visible, especially in attempts to restructure the security forces, including the police and the military.

The involvement of these external actors in the country's post-war reconstruction, and especially in SSR, was informed by a number of internal and external developments.

SSR initiatives, policies and activities in Sierra Leone

SSR in Sierra Leone is part of a national reform programme that can be traced to as far back as March 1996, when the democratically elected government of Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of the SLPP came to power.

Kabbah closely collaborated with the international community to set up a national good governance and public service reform programme. This was launched with strong support from the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and the African Development Bank. It was designed to address the following issues:

- Reactivating local government institutions through decentralisation of authority and responsibility and devolution of power from the centre to local and chiefdom levels
- Increasing the level of awareness of the people about their rights, privileges and obligations as citizens and enhancing their capacity to participate fully in the social, political and economic life of the country

- Strengthening the capacity and efficiency of the public sector to deliver essential services in a manner that discourages corruption and fosters transparency and accountability
- Reinforcing judicial institutions for safeguarding the rule of law and individual human rights (Good Governance and Public Service Reform Programme for Sierra Leone 1997)

In order to realise these objectives, the government, with support from the international community, established the Governance Reform Secretariat as part of the Ministry of Presidential Affairs to coordinate all governance reform activities.

SSR also features prominently in Sierra Leone's peace support reconstruction programme. The building of a strong national security apparatus is believed to be a deterrent against the relapse into conflict as well as a strategy to realise the vision of a peaceful, prosperous and progressive society (*Sierra Leone Vision 2025* 2003:58). In fact, the inability of the government to halt the advance of the rebels during the war was largely attributed to the weaknesses inherent in the country's security sector (Draft National Security Policy Paper for Sierra Leone 2000). A cross-section of Sierra Leoneans therefore believed that any post-war recovery programme must emphasise the need for a strong and effective security system that would be capable of protecting the state and its people and preventing the recurrence of conflict. These SSR concerns of the country square up neatly with the DFID's security sector interventions that put a premium on efforts to support civilian control, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and military training initiatives.²

Various peace agreements, government policies, development plans and international initiatives in Sierra Leone have over the years articulated the need for prioritising SSR. Articles 4 and 6 of the Abidjan Peace Accord of 1996 clearly spells out that there should be disarmament and return to barracks of all those units of the army not required for formal security duties. The implementation of this agreement was largely stymied by the intransigence of the RUF. Its leader, Foday Sankoh, for example refused to allow the deployment of a 720-member UN peacekeeping force as provided for by the agreement. The RUF members also objected to the SSR programme directed at the army.

In his state opening address of Parliament on 22 May 1998, President Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah reiterated his commitment to improving the

security of the state: 'I take the security of the country as my number one priority and intend to pursue this objective with all necessary vigour.' This pronouncement coming from the president, who also serves as commander-in-chief of the armed forces and minister of defence, is supposed to be indicative of commitment to SSR at the highest political level. The extent to which this presidential pronouncement has been translated to reality will be assessed in subsequent sections of this paper.

Article XVII of the Lomé Peace Accord, signed between the government of Sierra Leone and RUF/SL on 7 July 1999 in Lomé, Togo, also prioritises SSR:

The restructuring, composition and training of the new Sierra Leone armed forces will be carried out by the Government with a view to creating truly national armed forces, bearing loyalty solely to the State of Sierra Leone, and able and willing to perform their constitutional role (Lomé Peace Accord 1999, article XVII).

The country's Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of 2000 (IPRSP) also emphasised the crucial role of a vibrant security sector in efforts to reduce poverty. It clearly states that a secure, peaceful and stable environment can lead to several positive outcomes that could facilitate the implementation of anti-poverty programmes with maximum benefits to the poor. Unsurprisingly, the security sector review for the country's poverty reduction programme has as its major objective the development of a national security environment for Sierra Leone that will ensure national recovery and the reduction of poverty in a safe, secure environment. It envisions a national security environment with well-trained, well-equipped and highly motivated security forces.

Priority setting within SSR in Sierra Leone

The restoration of the democratically elected government in 1998 witnessed strong national and international resolve to promote SSR in Sierra Leone. Internationally, the process is being supported mainly by the UK through the DFID, the UK Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the British-led International Military Advisory Training Team (IMATT). The experiences of other African countries such as South Africa have also been very helpful. Ecomog and the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (Unamsil) are also visible in the SSR process in the country. The main security sectors targeted for the reform process are the armed forces, police, justice, parliament and intelligence. The British were particularly interested in maintaining a stable

democratic government by restoring all its functional machinery and social institutions. The thrust in the various sectors was as follows:

- The Ministry of Defence – to help ensure that the army remains accountable to the democratically elected government
- The police – to help create and sustain a civilian controlled peace countrywide
- The intelligence service – to ensure that it is accountable to the government and that its work is coordinated through the Office of National Security (ONS)
- The judiciary – to underpin increased police effectiveness, provide access to justice for all and to give teeth to the anti-corruption measures³

Reform of the armed forces

By 1998 it was clear that the Armed Forces of the Republic of Sierra Leone (AFRSL) was in need of serious reform and restructuring. There was a lack of discipline and professionalism, low morale, and deplorable living conditions. Added to this there was rampant corruption, a lack of transparency and poor civil-military relations, as well as poorly trained and equipped soldiers (*Engaging Sierra Leone (Report)* 2000). Not surprisingly, the restructuring and reform programme aims at creating truly national armed forces, bearing loyalty solely to the state of Sierra Leone, and able and willing to perform their constitutional role (Lomé Peace Accord 1999:19).

President Kabbah articulated his vision for the country's army against the background of a post-war society, pointing out that 'the Army now needs to be better organised equipped and tuned to discharge its constitutional role effectively' (*The Vision* 1997:5). He went on to say that a responsible government had to assign the highest priority to policies that seek to ensure that its defence forces are adequately trained and equipped to protect its territorial integrity, to repel intruders and – when necessary – to put down civil disturbances. The thrust of the reorganisation programme is the restoration of professionalism with the objective of re-establishing public and institutional confidence in the armed forces. The Draft National Security Policy Paper for Sierra Leone (2000) also envisaged armed forces that were accountable to the people, with transparent and proper financial management procedures and awareness of human rights and democratic

principles. The programmes identified for the realisation of these objectives are: a vigorous, transparent recruitment process; provision of adequate and decent barracks accommodation; increased regimentation; and a realistic salary and attractive retirement and resettlement package.

The Sierra Leone government explored many options in its drive to restructure and reform the country's armed forces. The Costa Rica model was one of the first possibilities it considered, which would have entailed not having an army but rather a well-trained and equipped police force only. This option was not popular in view of the security threat posed by the Liberian conflict and then volatile Guinean security situation in the Mano River region (Ero 2000). So, instead, the government requested the secondment of Nigerian Brigadier-General Maxwell Khobe as the country's new chief of defence staff. Brigadier-General Khobe had led a successful Ecomog operation that brought to an end the AFRC regime in 1998. He was in theory answerable simultaneously to the Nigerian and Sierra Leonean governments (*Africa Report* 2001:7).

The Sierra Leone government also approached Ecomog in Freetown to assist in preparing a position paper on armed forces reform and restructuring. Ecomog recommended the establishment of a 5 000-strong force consisting of a brigade headquarters that included a presidential guard, three infantry battalions, one light tank/reconnaissance battalion, one artillery regiment, and one rapid deployment force that would consist of a paratrooper battalion, a coast guard, and an air wing (Gbla 2002:18). Ecomog also recommended that the navy and air force be upgraded to fully-fledged services. Another laudable recommendation was that a new recruitment code be introduced and implemented that would place a premium on merit, fair and equitable representation of all ethnic groups, and qualifications. The latter aspect is very important as it would provide insurance against the recruitment of unfit individuals into the armed forces and would also be a deterrent against politicians who aspired to political power rather than state security. These recommendations would also have the advantage of ensuring the recruitment of fresh soldiers and the vigorous screening of service members in the armed forces.

The direct involvement of the UK in Sierra Leone's armed forces restructuring programme witnessed remarkable changes in the process, especially after 1998. The British government, through the DFID, developed a security sector programme for countries that are prone to instability, with the Sierra Leone programme serving as a pilot project. The DFID, in close collaboration with the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD-UK), has spent an estimated £21 million

on this project, known as the Sierra Leone Security Sector Project (Silsep). Silsep is a medium-term programme aimed at the restructuring and equipping of the security institutions to constitutionally and adequately perform their role in modern state building. Its major goal is the creation of sustainable peace in Sierra Leone to allow its government and people to make progress towards development in a stable environment in the new millennium. Its specific objectives are: the establishment of effective and appropriate civil control structures and efficient army command and management arrangements; an acceptable defence policy and acceptable budgets; and the creation of an office of national security capable of effective support to national security. Silsep established a security sector review committee with the mandate to undertake a comprehensive security review of Sierra Leone. The review appraised the country's security situation and exposed threats to its sustainability.

Through the MOD-UK, the MOD Advisory Team (MODAT) and IMATT, the British introduced a restructuring programme aimed at training, equipping and advising government forces, which is still continuing today (Malan et al 2003:96). A crucial aspect of this programme is the integration of UK military advisers into Sierra Leone forces; close coordination with Unamsil and the SLPP; and the enhancement of the combat effectiveness of the forces through ongoing advice and training.

Since the signing of the Lomé Peace Accord in 1999, these three organisations have been engaged in the training of future trainers of the AFRSL – platoon commanders and sergeants – by means of short-term training teams. The training focuses on key areas such as international humanitarian law, civil-military relations, the rights of children, budget management, and regional and sub-regional security issues. The retraining of non-commissioned officers under the oversight of IMATT also features prominently in the UK-led restructuring programme, which includes a series of training activities aimed at verifying and ascertaining the numerical strength of the force. The training takes place mainly in the areas of personal weapons training and physical fitness, battlefield first aid, laws of armed conflict, health and hygiene. To facilitate the eventual transfer of leadership to Sierra Leoneans, an infantry training advance team from IMATT has been stationed at the armed forces training centre at Benguema. Training of officer cadets takes place at the Horton Academy, located at the IMATT headquarters at Leicester Square in the outskirts of Freetown. The academy was officially opened by the president in 2003. Junior staff courses for lieutenants and second lieutenants of the armed forces will be held here shortly. Its establishment was timely and appropriate, because when IMATT is finally phased out, the

Sierra Leonean officer corps will be responsible for maintaining professional standards of the army.

The training programme is a true reflection of the aims of the Directorate of Defence Manning, Recruiting and Training in Sierra Leone and encompasses the following:

- Recruitment, training and commissioning courses
- Individual training
- Collective training
- External training
- Low-level trade training
- Officer training (at the armed forces training and education centres)

The plan also identified the following training objectives: to draft a policy document for recruiting and commissioning new entrants into the armed forces; to recruit 300 soldier entrants and 100 potential officers into the AFRSL every six months; to integrate training on human and children's rights and child protection issues into general training of the AFRSL; and to convert all 2 500 illiterate soldiers and officers in the AFRSL into military personnel with a basic education (Sierra Leone Ministry of Defence 2002:12).

Advising the government of Sierra Leone on the reorganisation of MOD Sierra Leone forms another important component of the UK's contribution to the restructuring programme. The British government appointed military and civilian advisers tasked with providing military advice to the government whilst the latter was required to help develop a defence policy and a strategy for making the MOD a more efficient department and also to help with a cash budgeting system. The Sierra Leone MOD had been a centrist and bureaucratic organisation controlled by the military, a state of affairs that led to corruption, lack of professionalism and the absence of inventiveness among the military members. The need for reform and restructuring of the country's MOD to enable it operate within the framework of a democratic Sierra Leone was a priority. In 2000 the British advisers, working closely with the government of Sierra Leone, established a new MOD, with a mission to 'formulate, implement, monitor and evaluate a strategic defence policy for the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces that is effective and fostered within a framework of democratic governance'.

In the new MOD there is a closer working partnership between civilians and military, with the two sections being regarded as a fully integrated team. In this new partnership arrangement, clear roles are identified for

both the military and civilians. In contrast to the past, civilians now occupy senior positions in the military administration. The director-general, the equivalent of a UK permanent secretary, is for example a civilian. He is the principal adviser on defence matters with primary responsibility for policy, finance, procurement and administration. He is also the principal accounting officer responsible to the minister of defence for the overall organisation, management and staffing of the department. He is personally responsible to Parliament for the expenditure of all public monies voted for defence. The deputy minister of defence is a civilian, too. It is not surprising, therefore, that the new MOD plays a vital role in handling and consolidating democratic civil–military relations (Defence White Paper for Sierra Leone, p 9).

The restructuring of the MOD also led to the introduction of a new budget structure, called the medium-term expenditure framework. The MOD's current budget consists of nine programme managers accountable to the director-general, who has the controlling vote. These programme managers are responsible for the management of their respective resources, with guidance and oversight provided by the finance and budget directorate.

Following the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants, there was a need to reabsorb elements of the AFRC, RUF and CDF into the military, provided they could meet the new recruitment criteria. One of the main objectives of this programme, popularly known as the military reintegration programme, was to integrate the various ex-fighters so as to enhance post-war reconciliation. By the end of the DDR 3 500 ex-fighters had been reoriented and formed part of the new army.

In an effort to meet the logistical needs of the AFRSL, IMATT, in close collaboration with the DFID, provided the army with 75 military Land Rovers, 25 military trucks, seven ambulances, two helicopter support units and eight armoured vehicles. Communication equipment was also provided to facilitate intelligence network supervision (IRIN 1999:1).

Recognising the crucial role of mutual accommodation towards enhancing the efficiency of members of the AFRSL, the restructuring programme launched operation PEBU, funded jointly by the government of Sierra Leone and the DFID. The government, on behalf of the British government, provided £1.9 million for this project. Some of the objectives of the project are improving the living and working conditions of members of the AFRSL and enhancing the redeployment units. The project entails refurbishment of existing barracks and building new ones.

Reform of the Sierra Leone police

Like the RSLA, the Sierra Leone police force was long overdue for reform and restructuring. The institution had for a very long time been characterised by politicisation, inefficiency, rampant corruption, poor service conditions, and a lack of basic facilities and equipment. The force was also still operating under its antiquated traditional role of protecting the state, its people and property as narrowly defined in the Police Act of 1964. The Act defines the principal role of the police force as 'the detection of crime and apprehension of offenders; preservation of law and order; protection of property and the enforcement of laws and regulations with which they are charged' (Police Act 1964). The force found it extremely difficult to respond adequately to post-war security challenges and needed some major reforms.

The police force, together with its international partners (the DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office), realised the need to introduce and implement a far-reaching reform and restructuring programme. Key areas were to define the role of the police service, its composition and training, mechanisms for oversight, budget allocation and conditions of service (Ero 2000:49). The government was so determined to realise the restructuring programme that it invited a seven-member Commonwealth police development task force to coordinate the programme in 1998. The task force, was amongst others, required to devise a plan for rebuilding the police force and to advise it on police practice, training and recruitment and human rights (Ero 2000:49). The recommendations and suggestions of this task force culminated in the Sierra Leone police restructuring programme.

In order to promote the restructuring programme, President Kabbah appointed Keith Biddle, an expatriate from Britain, as the inspector-general of the Sierra Leone Police Force. Biddle had a wealth of experience, as he served in the British police for more than 38 years. He made an invaluable contribution to the police restructuring programme.

In 1998 the government also released its Police Charter, which amongst others outlines the role of the police force in relation to the government and people, with emphasis on equal opportunity, professionalism and local needs policing. The charter states that the Sierra Leone police will assist in returning its communities to peace and prosperity by acting in a manner, which will:

- Eventually remove the need for the deployment of military and para-military forces in villages, communities and city streets

- Ensure the safety and security of all people and their property
- Respect the human rights of all individuals
- Prevent and detect crime by using the most effective methods, which can be made available to them
- Take account of local concerns through community consultation
- At all levels be free from corruption (Sierra Leone Policing Charter 1998)

In its quest to actualise the standards set in the charter, the police force released its mission statement that encompasses the following components that make the Sierra Leone police a force for good:

- **Duty** Providing a professional and effective service, which will protect life and property, achieve a peaceful society and take primacy in the maintenance of law and order
- **Values** Respecting human rights and freedom of the individual, honesty, impartiality and care that is free from corruption
- **Priorities** Responding to local needs, valuing the people, involving all in developing policing priorities
- **Aim** To win public confidence by offering reliable, caring and accountable police services

Various activities have been undertaken by the police restructuring programme to realise the aforementioned principles and values, such as the operationalisation of the local needs policing concept. The concept stresses the need for involving the people in a partnership with the police to maintain law and order. A community relations department at police headquarters is tasked to work in concert with all divisional commanders to promote local needs policing, develop and implement various crime prevention strategies with local unit commanders, and provide an efficient link between the police and the community (*Sierra Leone Police News* 2004:4).

There is also a complaint, discipline and investigations department that deals with complaints from the public about issues of police discipline and corruption and takes appropriate corrective action (*Sierra Leone Police News* 2004:5). The establishment of this department has done a great deal to curb police extortion and harassment of civilians.

A change management department was also established, which amongst others aims at improving the efficiency and productivity of police force members, especially with regard to management of its affairs. It also seeks to groom Sierra Leonean police officers for leadership positions that they will occupy after the British handover. The former special security department has been transformed into an operational support group whose functions include quelling internal upheavals and performing all operational duties related to security.

Finally, the restructuring programme has put in place oversight mechanisms to watch over the police force. One such mechanism is the police council, the highest police body, with power to provide civilian oversight of policing in Sierra Leone (Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991, section 55(I)). Its members include the vice-president (who serves as chairman), the minister of internal affairs, the inspector-general of police, the deputy inspector-general of police, the chairman of the Public Service Commission, a member of the Sierra Leone Bar Association, and two other members appointed by the president, subject to the approval of Parliament.

The restructuring programme also makes provision for the appointment of women in senior positions in the force.

Parliament

The Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 (Act 6 of 1991) gives considerable powers to Parliament and its select committees with regard to oversight functions over the country's security forces. Some of the parliamentary committees entrusted with this responsibility are the Committee on Presidential Affairs and Defence, which is essentially responsible for oversight over defence and national security; the Committee on Internal Affairs and Local Government, with oversight over the police and prisons; and the Transparency Committee, which deals with issues of impropriety and abuse of public office. In its attempt to enhance Parliament's oversight capacity over the security forces, the DFID is supporting a parliamentary capacity-building project.

The judiciary

Because it recognises the crucial role of an effective justice system in promoting good governance, the country's SSR programme places a premium on building a strong and effective legal system. One example is

the collaboration between the government of Sierra Leone and the DFID to refurbish the physical infrastructure of the courts throughout the country, so as to enhance and improve the delivery of justice. The law development project of the DFID, also with the assistance of the government, trained and deployed 87 justices of the peace, clerks and bailiffs to 18 locations in the country in 2003. The UNDP also agreed to provide a top-up of Le10 000 to the daily sitting allowances for justices of the peace in the provinces, to improve the conditions of service for members of the judiciary.

Intelligence and national security

In close cooperation with international partners, the government is putting in place mechanisms for the effective coordination of national security and effective intelligence gathering. To this end the National Security and Central Intelligence Act was passed in 2002. The Act established the National Security Council as the highest body for the consideration of security issues in the country. Its members include the president as chairman, the vice-president as deputy chairman, the ministers of finance, internal affairs, information and broadcasting, the deputy minister of defence, the minister of state presidential affairs, the inspector-general of police, the chief of defence staff and the national security coordinator, who serves as secretary of the council.

Its functions include appropriate measures to safeguard the internal and external security of the country, gathering of information relating to security, and integrating domestic and foreign security policies (National Security and Central Intelligence Act 2002). The secretariat of the council is the ONS, which is headed by a national security coordinator who is appointed by the President in terms of sections 154(1) and (2) of the 1991 constitution. The ONS has five different divisions, namely the secretariat to the council; a joint intelligence committee; a joint assessment staff; a monitoring and oversight division; and a security coordination division. To ensure decentralisation of the intelligence work in the country, the National Security and Central Intelligence Act makes provision for the establishment of provincial and district security committees in addition to the joint intelligence committee.

Evaluation of security sector reform in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's SSR programme, which was undertaken in tandem with efforts to resolve the conflict, received tremendous international support, especially

from the UK, Unamsil and Ecowas. Its focus on restructuring and equipping the country's various security institutions to enable them to adequately perform their constitutional role in modern state-building is a laudable initiative. Its specific objectives of reducing the threats of coups, enhancing democratic principles and human rights, containing external threats, and ensuring civilian oversight are also very fine on paper. The security sector policies, strategies and programmes in the country have attracted commendations as well as criticisms from various national and international quarters, focusing essentially on the realisation of set goals and objectives.

As is the case with most programmes of this nature, Sierra Leone's SSR programme has its spoilers and losers, as well as winners or supporters. Foremost among its spoilers are those within the security sector that are convinced that the reform programme will interfere with their soft zones. These include senior as well as junior members of the security forces who benefited tremendously from the old order, which was characterised by a lack of transparency and accountability, and archaic and ineffective rules and procedures. Other spoilers include top members of the executive, legislature and judiciary who lack the political will to put the reform programmes into practice. The most active supporters of the SSR programme are those Sierra Leoneans (including most ordinary, poor citizens) who stand to benefit greatly from professional and accountable security forces. Members of the international community that are providing the financial and human resources are indeed staunch supporters, but sometimes their unwillingness to commit funds speedily and to take into consideration the socio-economic, cultural and political realities of Sierra Leone do hamper the process.

Obviously, too, any analysis has to consider the sustainability of the programme, which is affected by a number of crucial areas, such as its acceptability to Sierra Leoneans in general, the state's capacity to generate funds nationally, and the continued support of international donors. On the issue of acceptability, most ordinary Sierra Leoneans accept the government as democratically elected – and therefore legitimate – and are accordingly willing to embrace SSR on the grounds that it will make the country's security forces more accountable and transparent. Furthermore, there is a willingness amongst most Sierra Leoneans to push the peace process forward by forgiving past transgressions. On the issue of economic sustainability, there is no denying the fact that as a post-war society, government finds it difficult to generate funds internally, but as there is also a determination to use the resources of the state judiciously and to curb corruption, the state should be able to sustain the programme. As for ownership, the strong international influence is not surprising, in view of the background of the forces before

the commencement of the reform programme. While the initial insensitivity of the external actors to the socio-economic, cultural and political realities of the country in programme design was problematic, the increasing realisation of the need for greater Sierra Leonean involvement is welcomed and should help to resolve the problems.

Our aim is to assess and evaluate the successes and failures of the SSR programme in Sierra Leone using the yardsticks of resurgence of violence, politicisation of the forces, economic sustainability, the rule of law, corruption, professionalisation, and social integration where applicable.

Resurgence of violence

With regard to the resurgence of violence, the country's SSR programme could be credited with the modest achievement of a completed disarmament and demobilisation, though with limited success in the area of reintegration of ex-combatants. The disarmament and demobilisation of ex-fighters (including the RUF, SLA, AFRC and CDF) were key provisions in both the 1996 Abidjan and 1999 Lomé peace accords. This led to the creation of a favourable environment not only for the official end of the war in January 2002, but also for the May 2002 elections in the country. With regard to the reintegration of ex-combatants, the situation is more worrisome. Former RUF, SLA and AFRC members were incorporated into the country's new armed forces by means of the military reintegration programme. But this facilitated reconciliation also has the potential for destabilisation, especially in the absence of an effective mechanism to reinforce the spirit of peaceful coexistence among former adversaries. This is exacerbated by a failure to absorb ex-fighters into integrated civilian units. If such groupings continue to exist, but do not have gainful employment, they could threaten post-war peace by becoming involved in crime. It is also worrisome that a fair number of ex-fighters who were not disarmed resurfaced as mercenary soldiers in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. The recently announced disarmament of over 200 former Sierra Leonean ex-fighters in Liberia is a case in point. The question is how these returnee ex-ex-combatants are going to be reabsorbed amicably into Sierra Leonean society.

Nepotism and ethnicity

Turning to the issue of addressing the problems of nepotism and ethnic tendencies in the security forces, Sierra Leone could be assessed positively

regarding implementation of a new recruitment code, especially for the armed forces, with the emphasis on education, qualification, professionalism and high sense of discipline. By emphasising the need for local identification and recommendation of potential recruits, the likelihood increases of a more refined and nationally oriented force, which contrasts strongly with the ethnic, regionally based armed forces of the past. In the new arrangement, there is an attempt to ensure an acceptable ethnic balance in the armed forces.

Rule of law

In its quest to ensure respect for the rule of law, the Sierra Leone 1991 constitution, as well as a number of other Acts of Parliament, has over the years provided for control of the security forces of the country. For example, the 1991 constitution and the National Security and Intelligence Act of 2002 afford many powers to the President, including the power as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces (Constitution 1991, section 40(1)), chairman of the National Security Council, and chairman of the Defence Council (National Security and Central Intelligence Act 2002, section 2(2)(a)). The 1991 constitution also empowers Parliament as the prime agent for the general enforcement of democratic accountability, as all government actions must be justified by Parliament, while parliamentary support is required for all proposed legislation to be enacted. Oversight over the security forces is ensured by various parliamentary committees, namely the Committee on Presidential Affairs and Defence for defence and national security; the Committee on Internal Affairs and Local Government for the police and prisons; the Legislative Committee; and the Justice and Transparency Committee to look at conflict of interests. Provision is also made for the establishment of a security sector committee in the Defence White Paper to be made up of independent representatives drawn from national stakeholders, who will be responsible for monitoring decisions taken by officials on behalf of government.

It is of concern, however, that in spite of this constitutional and legislative framework, there is a lack of strong civil mechanisms to provide oversight functions over the security forces. This absence could hamper success.

One of the major achievements of the SSR programme in Sierra Leone is the enhancement of the effectiveness of the security forces, especially the AFRSL and Sierra Leone police. Before the restructuring the country's security forces were not only ill-trained but also ill-equipped and poorly paid, and morale and esteem were consequently very low. The programme has over the years gradually changed this unfortunate situation by not only stepping up training

and professional development in the forces, but also by enhancing their capacity to respond to any national security threat. The command structure and bureaucracy of the current 14 500 armed forces has been restored and its combat readiness improved. The air wing of the force has one Mi-24 helicopter gunship while the maritime wing has one medium-sized Chinese-built vessel that is actively involved in maritime patrolling as a coast guard (Malan et al 2003:99). The forces have also received essential training in mortars and medium machine guns, as well as air defence and range management. The restructuring of the AFRSL led to the introduction and implementation of a fair, open and competitive recruitment procedure with opportunities for all sections of the population, without compromising merit. The new recruitment policy provides an insurance against the formation of regional and ethnic forces for regime rather than state protection. A full review of the pay, pensions, allowances, leave and resettlement packages has also helped to improve the living conditions of force members. Developments such as these have improved the confidence level within the AFRSL as members in the past suffered from a serious lack of confidence in their own professional military capability.

The SSR programme also improved the efficiency of members of the Sierra Leone police. In a bid to ensure a safe and secure environment, various strategic departments in the police were strengthened and provided with the necessary infrastructure to improve their efficiency in containing riots, civil unrest, domestic violence and economic crimes. One department that benefits extensively from this support is the Operation Support Department, which has been strengthened with regard to training of members and mobility. The police force also has a new structure and a new approach to policing, known as local needs policing, and coupled with the provision of new uniforms, vehicles and regular wages, this has given a tremendous boost to morale.

In spite of the success in enhancing the effectiveness of the security forces, the training programme is still inadequate, as it places more emphasis on combat readiness than on civil–security relations. Although combat readiness is a very important component, especially for the AFRSL, there is need for more concerted efforts to restore public confidence in the security forces as well as for strengthening the capacities of other sectors that play a role in security, such as the judiciary, Parliament, prisons and the media.

One aspect of the SSR programme in the country that has achieved outstanding success, relates to the promotion of transparency and accountability in the operations of the security sector. This is notable in the different proactive

sensitisation campaigns that have been run by the security institutions. The AFRSL promotes transparency via its newsletter called *Torch* and a live biweekly press briefing. The police have a media and public relations unit and also holds weekly press briefings to inform the public of police programmes and activities. The SSR programme in the country also resulted in the introduction and implementation of a transparent budgeting system for all ministries and agencies, including the security forces. Under the new budgeting system, known as the medium-term expenditure framework, which was introduced in 2001, the MOD-SL prepares detailed plans and estimates for a three-year period. Through a series of screenings, the assumptions, plans and costing are scrutinised to ensure that they are realistic and affordable. The approach provides programme managers with an opportunity to justify their resource requirements to senior managers.

The country's SSR programme has succeeded in not only ensuring physical security, but also in securing the individual from arbitrary actions by the security services. The Police Charter clearly spells out the need for recognising human rights and to this end the Sierra Leone police force is promoting a series of training activities on human rights and the law of armed conflicts. The AFRSL is also placing a premium on such training. In addition, the SSR programme has developed a service level agreement in the country worthy of mention as a success. This agreement amongst others calls for a partnership between the army and the police on the one hand and the navy in collaboration with the Marine Resources Ministry on the other. The programme promotes cooperation between the security forces to safeguard the country against external aggression.

Despite the achievements enumerated above, the ongoing SSR programme in the country has suffered many failures. Prominent among these is the hurried training given especially to members of the AFRSL through the military reintegration programme. As a large number of soldiers trained through this programme were drawn from formerly warring factions with limited training and orientation, it has the potential for friction and destabilisation.

The dominant role of external actors in the implementation of the programme could be problematic and has led to its viability and sustainability being questioned. In the first place, the initial focus did not take the country's socio-cultural values into consideration, resulting in too complex a security sector structure to be understood by the average Sierra Leonean citizen. Secondly, the predominance of foreigners in senior positions, in particular the appointment of a British inspector-general of police, had a negative impact on the credibility of the process.

Finally, unless drastic measures are taken to address the shortage of efficient civil institutions to oversee the security forces, there can be very little assurance of long-term success of the SSR measures.

Conclusion

In this paper Sierra Leone's SSR programme has been examined in the context of a post-war recovery programme with strong international support. The background and priorities as well as the successes and failures of the programme were discussed. Foremost among the conclusions of the paper is the view that the ongoing SSR programme in the country should be owned and driven by Sierra Leoneans if it is to be sustainable. It is also strongly argued that there is need for effective coordination of the activities of the various international actors involved in the programme. Another major argument is that that SSR programme in the country should go beyond the limited objective of retraining and restructuring formal security institutions and should focus on strengthening the oversight capacities of Parliament, the judiciary and civil societies. Some of the constraints of the country's SSR programme are lack of national capacity, especially with regard to finance and logistics; mistrust of the security forces by the ordinary citizens; and the sensitivity of the programme itself.

The following recommendations were made for promoting a sustainable SSR programme in the country:

- Serious efforts by the government and donors to actualise the four broad categories of the reform programme, namely strengthening democratic control of the security institutions, professionalisation of the security forces, strengthening the rule of law, and enhancing the capacity of civil institutions for effective oversight
- Strengthening of the security forces to ensure their ability to maintain peace in sub-regions, particularly the Mano River Basin
- Improvement in the conditions of service of members of the security forces
- Serious efforts to promote good governance

Notes

- 1 The CDFs were local groups that emerged during the war in Sierra Leone to protect their local hunters. In the north were the Donsos, Tamaboros and Gbethis and in the south-east were the Kamajohs and Donsos.

- 2 The major concerns of the DFID with regard to SSR.
- 3 These constitute part of the major strategy employed by the UK government in Sierra Leone's SSR programme.

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