

# Interagency Approaches to Prevent the Reoccurrence of Conflict in Sierra Leone

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Countries which experience one civil war are more likely to experience another. Recurrent civil wars impair economic investment and divert government funds from governance to security. The result of conflict-related resource destruction, impaired economic development, and weakened governance is a remarkably high rate of recidivism. In fact, nearly half of all countries relapse into civil war, a cycle of destruction and misery referred to as the “conflict trap.”<sup>1</sup> History shows some countries have emerged from war and experience economic recovery: Great Britain, France, Russia, Germany, and Rwanda are examples. That said, Sierra Leone emerged from civil wars nearly 20 years ago but is still struggling to recover fully. The 2014 Ebola epidemic was an additional blow to the country.

Sierra Leone suffered 11 years of civil war (1991–2002) followed by the 2014 Ebola epidemic. During those years, the country and the international community witnessed terrible atrocities. Tens of thousands of people were killed or died from indirect effects of the violence: disease, hunger and starvation. The infrastructure – electricity, hospitals, bridges, roads, schools, towns, villages, and government buildings – were either destroyed or went without repairs and maintenance until they

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collapsed. Sierra Leone possesses substantial mineral, agricultural and marine resources, but it has been struggling with economic recovery after the civil war, and particularly since the Ebola crisis.

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Sierra Leone's youth are suffering the worst. The median age is 19 with about 60% of the population under the age of 25. Of the youth, nearly 60% are unemployed.<sup>2</sup> Both youth unemployment and the "youth bulge" are strongly correlated with an increased incidence of violent conflict, particularly insurgency.<sup>3</sup> Sierra Leone has three markers of increased susceptibility to civil war: demography, legacy of prior conflict, and poor economic development. Since nothing can be done to change the legacy of the past, nor the demography of the present, setting the conditions for a successful and stable Sierra Leone pivots on enhancing its economic development.

Should the country slip back into war, the result will be more catastrophic than the past.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, violent extremist groups can take advantage of such situations where the government is weakened, to take up safe haven in ungoverned spaces. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has already made strategic attempts to capitalize on the vulnerabilities existing in Sierra Leone.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, with weak institutions the reoccurrence of epidemic diseases like Ebola Virus Disease is more likely, and as the recent past demonstrates, it can then quickly spread in the region and across the world. Based on the premise that the continued security of Sierra Leone is critical to the safety of the region and the world, this article seeks to recommend specific interagency approaches to economic

development to prevent Sierra Leone from relapsing into violence. We ask the question: How do we increase economic development, using an interagency approach, in Sierra Leone to prevent conflict from reoccurring?

## **Economic Development**

The importance of strong and sustained economic growth cannot be over-emphasized. The economy of a nation is the driver and sustainer of all sectors – security, agricultural, health, education, and it is a key instrument of national power. Countries with weak economies are prone to crisis and are attractive to violent extremist organizations. The link between poverty, economic variables, and intrastate conflict is amongst the most robust findings in the literature of conflict studies.<sup>6</sup>

Even in a field known for dissent, there is broad consensus amongst political scientists regarding the economic characteristics predicting future conflict. While successful so far avoiding relapse back into civil war, Sierra Leone still has much to accomplish to reduce its risk factors for civil war, namely economic development.

Sierra Leone, immediately after the civil war saw low productivity and exports, with high imports due to the loss of economic production capacity. During the war, most of the infrastructure (electricity, roads, industrial bases, government administrative offices) were destroyed during the fighting. The able-bodied working population, nearly 2.6 million persons, displaced as they fled towns and villages which held most of the farms, mining sites and factories.<sup>7</sup> As the fighting reached the capitol city, where these workers had fled, most of the educated working class fled yet further, to other countries. As a result, most business were vacated, vandalized, or relocated to other countries; especially foreign-owned business. The result to the country's economy was disastrous.

At the end of the war, life restarted from

the ashes. However, most people and business never returned to their town and villages. The government did not have the funds to immediately rebuild critical infrastructure. In the same vein, dislocated citizens did not have seed money to begin or restart their own businesses. Millions of dollars in foreign aid from donor countries, non-governmental organizations, and loans from international organizations helped to kick start the rebuilding of infrastructure, increase productivity, and spur economic growth. With foreign aid and Foreign Direct Investment, especially in mining, productivity and exports started to increase, but the growth was challenged by corruption and mismanagement, smuggling and exploitation, and the 2014 Ebola epidemic.

One of the material legacies from the civil war is the lack of electricity. The majority of Sierra Leoneans are still without power: only five percent of the population have access to electricity.<sup>8</sup> Despite a lack of electricity, Sierra Leone has impressive economic growth and a high industrial production growth rate; however real production remains low. The GDP growth rate for 2017 was 6%, unchanged from the previous year.<sup>9</sup> While this GDP growth rate is quite good, the stagnation is concerning. Even small decreases in GDP can be worrisome and predispose a country to increased risk of violent conflict.

Lower personal income, as measured by GDP per capita, is also correlated with an increased incidence of violent conflict; this finding is arguably the most robust finding in all literature studying causes of violent conflict.<sup>10</sup> Sierra Leone ranks a woeful 211 of 228 worldwide in GDP per capita.<sup>11</sup> While Sierra Leone is fortunate in its GDP growth rate in 2016 and 2017, its stagnating economic growth and the economic fallout of the Ebola outbreak are both risk factors correlated with increased instability. Economic development support to Sierra Leone should be prioritized in order to support continued economic growth and stability.

Despite the apparent positive GDP growth of the economy, inflation negates the positive effects. Inflation in Sierra Leone reached 16.9% in 2017, up 5% from the previous year.<sup>12</sup> Inflation of this magnitude *de facto* eliminates the encouraging GDP growth rate cited above, and likely reduces its beneficial effects on stability. Economic development is critical to raise GDP per capita, continue strong GDP growth, and thereby reduce Sierra Leone's risk for civil war recrudescence. One way to increase economic activity is to enhance the productivity of the fishing sector. Such a method requires an interagency approach.

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## Securing the Fishing Sector

Interagency cooperation can work to stabilize Sierra Leone's economic development of off-shore fisheries. Sierra Leone loses \$29 million per year due to illegal fishery poaching.<sup>13</sup> Most of these costs are borne by the civilian population who rely on fisheries for their livelihood and sustenance. The 2013 Millennium Development goals identified economic development as critical to meeting developmental benchmarks. Due to the setbacks of the 2014 Ebola outbreak, and continued losses from maritime poaching, Sierra Leone is at higher risk than ever to miss these development goals. A true interagency approach is necessary to integrate civilian, military, and international partners to help address illegal maritime activity. If Sierra Leone is successful at securing its coast from illegal activity, it stands to regain millions in economic activity, and thereby enhance its long-term stability.

The poaching of fish is a significant issue for both the Sierra Leonean government and

its citizens, many of whom do not receive adequate nutrition. “Nearly half the population does not have enough to eat, and fish make up most of what little protein people get. But the country’s once-plentiful shoals ...have lured a flotilla of unscrupulous foreign trawlers. Most of the trawlers fly Chinese flags ...and [are] pushing Sierra Leone’s fisheries to the brink of collapse.”<sup>14</sup> Sierra Leone is not alone in its reliance on fishing; the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates that worldwide, \$1.5 trillion is comes from ocean-stock, and accounts for 17 per cent of global animal protein consumption (and much more in developing countries).<sup>15</sup> The World Bank estimates that worldwide approximately \$80 billion is lost each year due to illicit fishing.

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In fact, during the most recent meeting between President Bio and the U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone, President Bio emphasized the need for a signed National Maritime Strategy to support secure, sustainable, and profitable seas. The United States, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, recently funded a series of events aimed at completing the Sierra Leone National Maritime Strategy, a National Maritime Policy, and a Framework for a Whole-of-Government Approach to Maritime Security, all of which are currently awaiting final governmental approval.<sup>16</sup> International support to addressing Sierra Leonean policy gaps was crucial to ensuring a policy framework existed to comprehensively address future maritime strategy.

International civilian institutions can also aid in the endeavor to restore the past damage done to Sierra Leone’s fisheries through technical

expertise and direct aid. The World Bank funded the West Africa Regional Fisheries Program (WARF-P) in 2010. This program assisted Sierra Leone in developing policy that established a 6-mile exclusion zone from shore restricted to community fishing vessels. WARF-P is part of a greater \$3.7 billion World Bank Group program designed to promote strong governance of marine and coastal resources and the supporting of sustainable aquaculture, which has been credited with a moderate increase in fish stocks as of 2014.<sup>17</sup>

Military resources are also helpful in assisting Sierra Leone to secure its natural fishery resources to ensure economic stability. Patrol and interdiction of seafaring vessels is an inherently interagency activity: military vessels with military personnel patrol the area, while civilian authorities aboard retain interdiction and arrest authorities. Exercises to enhance the interoperability of these agencies ensures the seamless orchestration of complex operations. United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM) runs an exercise program, African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership, or AMLEP. Under this program, Sierra Leonean civilian authority boarding teams and military personnel exercise annually with a U.S. Coast Guard team onboard a Coast Guard or Navy vessel patrolling in the nation’s territorial waters.<sup>18</sup> This program supports the transfer of best practices and professionalization of these operations. They also buttress and improve routine patrols by Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces Maritime Wing (RSLAFMW) with civilian Joint Maritime Committee (JMC) authorities.

Regional cooperation between civilian and military organizations is necessary to secure the transnational nature of fisheries. With funding and strategic support, Gulf of Guinea countries have banded together to form the Multinational Maritime Coordination Center. This effort ensures adequate training and interoperability of partner nations in patrolling Gulf of Guinea

waters; the partnership prevents duplication of efforts and represents a comprehensive approach to establishing maritime security throughout the region.<sup>19</sup> Understandably, communication and coordination are difficult obstacles with so many countries and agencies involved; and, the Multinational Maritime Coordination Center summits are instrumental to overcoming this challenge.

Regional military cooperation exercises support interoperability of Gulf of Guinea states. The annual Obangame Exercise brings the U.S. 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet together with a large multinational coalition. 2018's exercise included 31 nations, including all Gulf of Guinea nations. Together, these militaries exchanged best practices to ensure deterrence of narco-traffickers, protection of fisheries trade, and prevention of piracy.<sup>20</sup> These efforts allow for regional trade to continue unhampered, prevent illicit poaching of fishery resources, and thus enhance the region's overall economic stability.

## Ongoing Challenges

Additional military resources are necessary for the success of the RSLAFMW. The current capability of the maritime wing is 70 nautical miles from shore.<sup>21</sup> However, the economic exclusion zone, Sierra Leone's sovereign waters, extends 200 nautical miles from baseline. Deeper water capability is necessary to successfully interdict illicit fishing in such a large area. Foreign military sales or foreign military financing of sea-faring vessels or unmanned aerial vehicles with range beyond the current capabilities represents an opportunity to extend U.S. influence and access to this region, while improving the capability of the RSLAFMW to secure its fisheries.

Lack of electricity is a vital interest to providing security of maritime resources; sonar, communication systems, and surveillance all require reliable electricity. Fortunately, the World Bank recently approved a one-time

allocation of \$100,000 to support the operation center of the JMC with internet connectivity and electricity.<sup>22</sup> One time investments are appreciated and necessary, but do not address ongoing operational costs. The JMC will be fully operational only once the Ministry of Finance appropriates operating funds and releases them to the JMC. Technical assistance teams can assist the Ministry of Finance in the smooth operation of this routine governance function. Agencies such as the United Kingdom's National School of Government International, operating out of the Stabilisation Unit, can provide small, expeditionary expert teams to develop governance capacity using a practitioner-to-practitioner model.<sup>23</sup> The U.K. has historically invested heavily in Sierra Leone, and this represents yet another opportunity for success between the partners. Additionally, support from the U.K. Stabilisation Unit may be warranted to ensure that JMC and Multinational Maritime Coordination Center regulations and tactics, techniques, and procedures mesh with international law and best practices.

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## Conclusions

Sierra Leone has three markers of increased susceptibility to return to civil war: demography, legacy of prior conflict, and poor economic development. Little can be done to change the legacy of the past, nor the demography of the present; setting the conditions for a successful and stable Sierra Leone pivots on enhancing its economic development. One crucial part of economic development strategy in Sierra Leone includes an interagency approach to the fishery sector.

Much is being done across DOTMLPF-P to support Sierra Leone's economic development through securing its natural resources off-shore. The military Exercise Obangame Express, facilitates analysis of RSLAFMW doctrinal gaps and organizational needs in a multilateral environment, emphasizing the interoperability of all militaries present. Training and leadership are developed during bilateral exercises, such as USAFRICOM's African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership, and are crucial to the coordination and sharing of best practices amongst interagency stakeholders.

**None of the existing international, interagency efforts address personnel aspects of Sierra Leone's maritime anti-poaching operations.**

The maritime policy improvements under President Bio should be applauded. International civilian agency technical support, like the World Bank's West Africa Regional Fisheries Program (WARF-P) has made great strides in assisting the fisheries of Sierra Leone to recover from devastation by poaching through policy development and technical support. Similarly, the recent collaboration between the U.S. and the United Nations Development Programme, assisted in addressing national policy gaps by completing the Sierra Leonean National Maritime Strategy, National Maritime Policy, and Framework for a Whole-of-Government Approach to Maritime Security. These policy documents, once granted final approval, will provide a comprehensive national approach to conserving Sierra Leone's vital natural resource.

However, additional work remains on materiel, facilities, policy, and personnel. Sierra Leone needs additional materiel to fully secure its economic exclusion zone. Unmanned aerial vehicles with range to 200 nautical miles would be more effective at identifying illegal trawling

than the current capability of 70 nautical miles. Similarly, ships of similar range are necessary to convey Sierra Leonean civil authorities and military personnel to conduct vessel boarding, search and seizure operations, and arrest violators of Sierra Leonean law. Once these new technologies are acquired, Sierra Leonean forces will need additional training in their successful operation and maintenance.

The Joint Maritime Committee operation center needs a reliable electricity source and secure funding to ensure its continuous operations. The one-time grant from the World Bank will address a small part of this problem. However, it does not address the long-term success of the operations center, a lynchpin in centralized coordination and mission control across the interagency enterprise. Technical support from the U.K. National School of Government International, or a similar institution, is needed to develop governance capacity within the Sierra Leonean Ministry of Finance, ensuring the continuous funding of this vital operations mission control center. The U.K. National School of Government International may also provide governance support through reviewing the new Sierra Leonean maritime policy documents for compatibility with international law and conventions.

None of the existing international, interagency efforts address personnel aspects of Sierra Leone's maritime anti-poaching operations. Personnel who represent "the long arm of the law" hundreds of miles away from shore are susceptible to ethical quandaries of human rights and corruption. A comprehensive analysis of recruitment and training of RSLAFMW personnel should be conducted as part of the next AMLEP or integrated into Exercise Obangame 2019. In a country of 60% youth unemployment and average age of 19, finding applicants is not a challenge; quality control is. The evaluation should determine the best way to successfully recruit and train strong

RSLAFMW officers and JMC civil authorities with superior ethics and integrity, in combination with the tactical and technical expertise to conduct complex vessel boarding, search and seizure operations. Additional consideration should be paid to instituting anti-corruption disciplinary procedures to ensure the lasting integrity of the force through selective retention.

Failure to support Sierra Leone raises the likelihood of many misfortunes: its return to conflict, susceptibility to violent extremist organizations such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and new disease outbreaks. All too recently, the world has witnessed the outcomes of letting such destructive forces range unchecked. Preventing such transnational threats is an international community imperative. **IAJ**

## NOTES

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