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## **Case Study of Sierra Leone**

### **Sierra Leone: Ironic Tragedy**



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*The tragedy of Sierra Leone is that her people are among the poorest in the world while the country is among the richest. The reasons for this are entirely man-made. Other countries in the world are poor because of natural disasters, few resources, unfertile territory, or bulging populations. Not so in Sierra Leone. God blessed this land with an abundance of resources. Just a relatively few people are responsible for the misery and hardship suffered by so many.*

*(Peter Penfold, British High Commissioner to Sierra Leone)*

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## **I. Introduction**

**A**t a time when the end of the cold war increased prospects for peace in Africa, Sierra Leone's rebel war from 1991 to 1999 shocked the world not only by its atypical gruesome violence but also because Sierra Leone had favourable prospects for human security and sustainable development in the immediate post-independence years: a rich natural resource base comprising diamonds and other minerals, and abundant agricultural and marine resources; one of the most developed educational systems in Sub-Saharan Africa epitomized by the famous Fourah Bay College, the first university in the region; brisk GDP growth averaging four percent a year; and a democratic and seemingly stable political system. However, by the 1990s Sierra Leone's socio-economic condition had degenerated into an ironic tragedy: pernicious civil war, widespread poverty and low human development - last on the UNDP Human Development Index for 1991 and other years - amidst abundant "unfulfilled potential".

2. What went terribly wrong with Sierra Leone, unleashing eight years of internecine civil war some thirty years after independence in spite of favourable initial conditions? Is there an explanation for the civil war in this context of poverty and failed development amidst tremendous potential? And were interests in the rich diamond and other natural resources underlying and sustaining the war? How did external interventions affect the conflict and what was the role of external agencies? Furthermore, what economic and institutional policies can consolidate the fragile peace and facilitate post-war economic recovery?

3. This paper illuminates the economic dimensions of Sierra Leone's rebel war. Section 2 probes Sierra Leone's historical political economy to unearth the root cause of the war: Siaka Stevens' personalized dictatorship from 1968-85, using corruption and violence to exploit malleable political institutions for power and wealth, entrenching patrimonialism, and disabling agencies of restraint and institutions for conflict management. This produced "proximate" causes of war-economic decline and poverty, high youth unemployment, violations of the rule of law, government dysfunction, rural isolation and regional and

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ethnic grievances - organized towards actual rebellion initially by radical university students with support from Libya and later neighbouring Liberia. After profiling the war, Section 2 shows further that despite a peace accord, and launch of conflict prevention and economic recovery policies, serious risks of war endure-a weak government, a rebel force largely intact, pending elections, and increased poverty and unemployment, all amidst abundant diamond and other lootable resources. Section 3 illustrates how congruence of the protagonists' diamond and other interests sustained the war while Section 4's assessment of external interventions in the conflict concludes that they were mixed blessings: they sometimes bolstered or re-instated a collapsing state but tended to delay a negotiated settlement. Section 5 highlights the critical though tardy role of external agencies in attaining peace and their future role in consolidating peace and national reconstruction. Section 6 concludes.

## II. Causes and Risks of War

### 2.1 Causes of War<sup>1</sup>

Conflict theories attribute the causes of civil wars to factors such as ethnic and religious hatred, national grievance against a government perceived to be working against the national interest, and distributional grievance by those perceiving government performance as discriminatory-along ethnic, religious or other lines. From an economic perspective, rebellion can be considered as an employment choice motivated by a low opportunity cost as in widespread poverty, or by the prospective gains of capturing the state and looting its resources. Whatever the cause, an economic base is needed to sustain a war. In the case of Sierra Leone there were both national and distributional grievances to trigger civil war, and an economic base to sustain it.

#### 2.1.1 National grievances

5. Siaka Stevens' All People's Congress (APC) used violence through the notorious Internal Security Unit or underclass "ghetto" youths fed with drugs and false promises of employment to stifle political and civic opposition, culminating in one party dictatorship from 1978 to 1992<sup>2</sup>. The result was a growing army of unemployed, disillusioned, drug-addicted youths acculturated to violence, who would later constitute the recruitment base for the rebellion. Agencies of restraint and institutions for conflict management-civil society, the judiciary, traditional rulers, were co-opted or suppressed while a culture of fear and silence permeated the populace.

6. In tandem with violence, Stevens institutionalized corruption through a patrimonial system of rationed favours, theft of public funds, illicit payments and bribes, rent from economic distortions induced by price controls and administrative allocation of basic commodities-rice, fuel and foreign currency; allocation of access rights in the exploitation of

<sup>1</sup> Annex 1 gives a chronology of the war and related events.

<sup>2</sup> Outstanding instances of APC-sponsored violence include the burning of Ginger Hall, the pro-opposition Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) settlement in Freetown in 1968; the general elections of 1973 when the SLPP was forced to withdraw, and of 1978 when thugs were mobilized to wreak mayhem in Bo District, an SLPP stronghold in the Southern Province; and the 1977 nation-wide student-led anti-APC demonstration when 40 people were killed in one day in Freetown.

diamonds and other natural resources, and individual exceptions to general rules<sup>3</sup>. This resulted in competitive and uncoordinated looting of the state and its resources by party functionaries and their collaborators especially Lebanese and other foreign potentates who cartelized key sectors, thriving on massive smuggling of diamonds, gold, etc, and other fraudulent business practices, while wielding considerable political clout. This restricted access to resources aggravated inequality, inflaming the desire for rebellion.

7. The diminution of formal diamond mining accounting for over 70 percent of foreign exchange earnings in the late 1960s was a direct consequence of Stevens' skulduggery<sup>4</sup>. As pre-independence minister of mines in the 1950s, Stevens had justifiably advocated corporate exploitation of diamonds. However, as opposition leader and candidate in the 1967 general elections, he lobbied the large body of thousands of illicit diamond miners operating in sites belonging to the corporate Sierra Leone Selection Trust which mined most of the country's diamonds, promising free for all mining if elected. Emboldened by Stevens' promise, illicit mining exploded with the ascension of Stevens' All People's Congress in 1968. Moreover, Stevens was directly associated with looting of diamonds. He and his Afro-Lebanese collaborator, Jamil Sahid Mohamed, allegedly masterminded the theft in November 1969 of the Sierra Leone Selection Trust's monthly diamond haul<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, Stevens tolerated massive theft of diamonds belonging to the state-owned National Diamond Mining Company, created in 1971 to take over a nationalized Sierra Leone Selection Trust. Consequently, Sierra Leone's official diamond exports plummeted from two million carats in 1970 to less than two hundred thousand in 1984.

8. The conjunction of corruption, diminution of formal diamond mining and declining terms of trade in the 1970s, led to declining GDP growth from nearly four percent in the 1960s to 1.9 percent in the 1970s and further to 0.5 percent in the 1980s, culminating in falling per capita income, widespread poverty and high unemployment especially among youths entering the labour force<sup>6</sup>. In 1990, over 80 percent of the population lived below the poverty line of one dollar a day. The economic decline and informalization of the economy decreased the tax base, increasing dependence on foreign aid which in 1990 financed 90 percent of development expenditures. A structural adjustment programme launched in 1989 resulted in removal of subsidies on basic commodities and large-scale public sector retrenchment.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Indicators at the Onset of War (1990)

Per capita income (US\$)	Rate of inflation (%)	% of population living in poverty	Life expectancy at birth	Adult literacy Rate	Infant mortality Rate	Human Development Index
250	111	81.6	42	20.7	146	160/160 (1991)

**Source:** UNDP Human Development Report 1991 (UNDP, New York).  
National Human Development Report for Sierra Leone 1996 (UNDP, Freetown).  
International Financial Statistics Yearbook 1998 (IMF).

<sup>3</sup> Stevens' often quoted infamous dictum reflected the ethos of his administration "oosie dem tie cow nar dae ee go eat" - a cow grazes wherever it is tethered.

<sup>4</sup> Stevens was very charismatic. His proverbial witticism and unpredictability mesmerised and kept others permanently second guessing him. In his latter years, he also used age to his advantage, treating his subjects as his children.

<sup>5</sup> Harbottle (1976) gives a detailed account of the theft.

<sup>6</sup> Youth unemployment was compounded by the elitist educational system failing to cater for non-academic (technical and vocational) abilities, leading to large-scale drop-outs, and further by rural isolation inducing rural-urban migration.

9. Corruption and economic decline induced government dysfunction, gravitating towards state collapse. By the late 1980s infrastructure and basic utilities like electricity and water supply had virtually collapsed even in Freetown, the national capital. Much of the economy went underground with buoyant black markets for scarce basic commodities. Furthermore, an extremely complacent General Joseph Momoh, unlike Stevens, his predecessor, neglected state security, even after allowing bases by the West African Intervention Force, ECOMOG, fighting Charles Taylor's rebels in neighbouring Liberia, in spite of Taylor's threat that Sierra Leone would "taste the bitterness of war"<sup>7</sup>.

### 2.1.2 Distributional grievances

10. Distributional grievances emanated from rural isolation, and ethnic and regional rivalries. Stevens' regime aggravated isolation of rural Sierra Leone – home to 80 percent of the population and producing much of the country's wealth - through under-pricing of export produce by the state monopolist-the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board, exchange rate overvaluation and subsidies on imported food that implicitly taxed rural agriculture while subsidizing urban consumption, and complete deprivation of the rural areas of electricity, pipe-borne water, telecommunication facilities, a developed road network and other facilities. The railway linking the rural areas to Freetown was dismantled in the early 1970s while no road network replaced it in the rural areas. Socio-economic indicators provide further evidence of rural isolation. In 1990, access to safe water and sanitation was 83 percent and 59 percent respectively for the urban areas, compared to 22 percent and 35 percent for rural areas.

11. One reason for rural isolation was the substantial support from Freetown for Stevens in the 1967 general elections which brought him to power where Stevens himself won a parliamentary seat. Furthermore, the politically volatile Freetown community posed the biggest threat to Stevens' authority<sup>8</sup>. Rural isolation also enabled Stevens to aggrandize and over-centralize power in Freetown by co-opting or subjugating local government bodies and traditional leaders, hitherto the bulwark of the Sierra Leone People's Party. Higher illiteracy and inability of the rural population to organize and articulate its interests permitted rural isolation.

12. Rural isolation aided the war in three ways. First, it induced large-scale migration to towns by young people who merely swelled the ranks of the unemployed and were among those recruited by the rebel movement. Second, chiefs appointed by Stevens were generally unpopular and repressive, alienating many subjects, some of whom joined the rebel movement to seek revenge. Third, apathy towards the rural areas induced a nonchalant response to the war by government and the more influential Freetown public who initially perceived it as a distant "rural" war until major towns were hit.

13. Regional and ethnic rivalries also generated distributional grievances. Rivalry between the Creoles and the remaining sixteen ethnic groups has been largely upstaged since the 1960s by rivalry between the Mende-dominated Southern and Eastern Provinces,

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<sup>7</sup> Further evidence of lack of security consciousness that aided preparation of the rebellion was the fact that anti-government activists recruited youths from Freetown and other towns for military training in Libya between 1987-88 to overthrow the government without alarming the authorities.

<sup>8</sup> Students at Fourah Bay College in Freetown spearheaded the anti-Stevens campaign. Notably, Stevens was almost overthrown by national riots which started with a Fourah Bay College student demonstration against Stevens in 1977. Freetown-based trade unions also sometimes resorted to strikes such as in 1981.

and the Temne-dominated Northern Province<sup>9</sup>. While the south-eastern regions are the breadbasket of Sierra Leone, producing then all the country's exports: diamonds, rutile, bauxite, cocoa and coffee, distributional grievances by these regions were rife under the All People's Congress (APC). Although urbanisation, inter-marriages and other forms of socialisation have integrated ethnic groups considerably, rivalries persist to date

14. Such rivalries have made political institutions malleable, almost unleashing tribal war in the late 1960s<sup>10</sup>. Exploitation by politicians of such rivalries and widespread illiteracy largely account for poor governance and lacklustre political leadership to date, which helped trigger the war and subsequently prolonged it-politicians and political parties are elected or assessed primarily on the basis of regional and ethnic considerations<sup>11</sup>. Though not a "tribal" war the rebellion often stimulated ethnic passions and ethnically motivated attitudes which aided it, such as the debate following the restoration of Kabbah in 1998 about whether to end the war militarily or through negotiations. People from the north often perceived the war as a "Mende war" while those from the southeast often blamed it on "northerners". Ethnic prejudices accounted for the complacent response to the onset of war by the All People's Congress government. Furthermore the weakness of the Kabbah government which allowed an escalation of the war and the invasion of Freetown in 1997 and 1999 is partly attributable to ethnic factors. Belonging to the minority Madingo tribe, Kabbah lacks a political constituency. An outside marriage of convenience to the Sierra Leone People's Party Mende-dominated power base, the ingenuous Kabbah has been buffeted by machinations of party functionaries and infighting.

## **2.2 The War Trajectory**

15. Widespread poverty and high youth unemployment, amidst rich diamond and other lootable natural resources, made war an economically rational option with a low opportunity cost<sup>12</sup>. Corruption, violations of the rule of law and a collapsing state provided a political impetus and justification for war, aggravated by rural isolation and ethnic and regional grievances among disaffected groups. But just how were these grievances organized into armed rebellion?

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<sup>9</sup> Administratively the country is divided into four regions: the Western Area comprising Freetown the national capital and its environs, and the Southern, Eastern and Northern Provinces. The population share of the main ethnic groups are, as last reported in the 1974 census, the Mendes (31%), the Temnes (30%), the Limbas (8%) and the Creoles (2%). The Creoles, descendants of freed slaves resettled in the Western Area, have played an important role in the country despite their small share in the population due to their exposure to western education and culture before the other ethnic groups.

<sup>10</sup>In the 1967 general elections the perceived northern-based opposition APC won a narrow and controversial victory over the ruling Sierra Leone's People's Party (SLPP), perceived as Mende, south-eastern based. However, the head of the army, a Mende like the outgoing prime minister, staged the country's first military coup preventing Siaka Stevens' APC from assuming office. A second coup followed. Meanwhile Stevens was reportedly training guerillas in neighbouring Guinea. Possible ethnic/regional war was averted when junior military officers staged another coup and instated Stevens in 1968.

<sup>11</sup> This was particularly evident in the 1967 general elections whose results followed distinct regional patterns: the APC won all but one of the seats in the north, and all the contested seats in the Western Area while the SLPP won most seats in the Southern and Eastern Provinces.

<sup>12</sup> Abdullah (1997) and Rashid (1997) discuss in detail the centrality of youths to the rebellion including the catalytic part played by radical youth culture shaped by reggae music and the liberation struggles in Southern Africa.

16. Expelled student radicals from the University of Sierra Leone's Fourah Bay College campus, the seedbed for anti-APC agitation, recruited volunteers from the growing army of potential rebels-students, unemployed "ghetto" youths, etc, for military training in Libya to overthrow the APC, culminating in the formation of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF)<sup>13</sup>. Many students later abandoned the cause, permitting the leadership of Foday Sankoh, a former army corporal once jailed by the APC for taking part in a coup attempt. Subsequently, Sankoh eliminated the remaining "intellectuals" who threatened his leadership. Ideological barrenness, and the low social standing of the rebels - mainly "ghetto" drug-addicted youths - explains why, with the onset of war, the RUF inflicted terror and unspeakable atrocities against civilians in order to conscript and enforce bonding and acceptance.

17. The RUF launched the rebellion in 1991 with support from Liberian and Burkinabe fighters on loan from Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia, attacking the town of Bomaru, bordering Liberia on the east. The war was initially limited to the south-eastern regions. In April 1992 a group of young soldiers protesting their neglect at the war front seized power setting up the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) headed by 27 year old Captain Valentine Strasser. The war escalated under the NPRC, coming to within thirty miles of Freetown. In a palace coup in January 1996 Captain Strasser was replaced by his deputy, Brigadier Maada Bio who attempted to postpone pending general and presidential elections on grounds of favouring peace talks but backed down due to domestic and foreign pressure. In March 1996 the victorious Tejan Kabbah and his Sierra Leone's People's Party were inaugurated. In November 1996 the abortive Abidjan Peace Accord was signed by the warring parties. In May 1997 the military seized power establishing the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) in coalition with the RUF. After eight months of civil disobedience and international sanctions, the West African Intervention Force, ECOMOG reinstated Kabbah, driving the rebels-the RUF and renegade AFRC soldiers, to the interior of the country. However the rebels re-consolidated and re-invaded Freetown in January 1999 but were again repulsed by ECOMOG within a few weeks. The Lome Peace Accord was signed by government and the RUF in July 1999.

18. The Lome Peace Accord calls for power sharing between government and the rebels<sup>14</sup>. The RUF is to transform into a political party. Its leader, Foday Sankoh, enjoys the status of vice president and is chairman of the Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction and Development, charged with management of diamonds and other mineral resources. A general amnesty has been granted the rebels and a truth and reconciliation commission is to be established. Elections are scheduled for 2001.

19. The war inflicted tremendous damage on Sierra Leone, costing thousands of lives (estimates range from 20,000 to 75,000) and internally or externally displacing about 2.1 million people, nearly half the population. Thousands of skilled personnel were among those killed or displaced. The rebels amputated, sexually assaulted and conscripted thousands of men, women and children, posing a potential AIDS crisis in the coming years. Infrastructure and public and private property were looted or destroyed. Virtually all major economic activities were disrupted while the provision of basic social services virtually

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<sup>13</sup> See Abdullah (1997) for a detailed account of the formation of the RUF.

<sup>14</sup> The AFRC did not feature in the accord's provision for power sharing but was subsequently included in the

stopped outside Freetown. Defence expenditures as a percentage of GDP increased from one percent in 1990 to 5.9 percent in 1996.

Table 2: Evolution of Macroeconomic Indicators during War (1988-99)

Year	GDP growth (%)	Inflation (%)	Black market premium (%)	Current account deficit (% GDP)	Foreign debt (% GDP)	Defense expenditure (% of total recurrent)
1988	2.0	31	148		51	
1989	2.8	63	171		59	12
1990	-3.0	111	119	-8.7	91	7
1991	-2.2	103	118	-3.9	81	15
1992	-4.4	66	107	-2.0	112	21
1993	0.6	15	104	-9.1	88	26
1994	-2.6	22	100	-14.6	84	32
1995	-10	26	113	-16.2	92	42
1996	5	23	104	-17.2	119	22
1997	-17.6	15	204	-3.2	135	
1998	-0.8	36		-9.1	176	

**Source:** Ministry of Finance, Freetown.

20. All in all, though simultaneity of a beleaguered adjustment programme initiated in 1989 and the rebel war compounds assessment of the economic consequences, the war largely accounts for negative GDP growth of -4 percent from 1991-98 and has raised already high levels of unemployment and poverty.

### 2.3 Conflict Prevention and Economic Recovery Policies

21. Government is implementing policies to consolidate peace and facilitate economic recovery, notably a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programme as part of a wider National Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Programme. A World Bank-motivated Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper is being prepared. The army is being restructured towards greater professionalism. However, considerable dependence on donor funding and weak technical and administrative capacity prevents effective government leadership of this donor-driven process.

### 2.4 Enduring Risks of war

22. Despite the Lome peace accord, the risk of war remains high. Dilatoriness by the RUF has left the critical disarmament programme way behind schedule with only about a third of the estimated 45,000 combatants already disarmed. The rest are still holding out in the bush. The agreement has been breached periodically with rebels disarming peacekeepers. The RUF is believed to be militarily largely intact and has been occupying the diamond-rich Kono District since 1998, prompting fears of diamond mining to finance a resumption of the war. Furthermore, the war has aggravated some of its proximate causes: poverty and unemployment, and possibly inequality. Political institutions are still malleable with widespread illiteracy, enduring ethnic and regional rivalries and a fledgling democracy. The public sector is awash with corruption scandals. Above all, the country

lacks strong directional political leadership. There is also the issue of elections scheduled for 2001. What if the RUF loses? Will it resume the war as UNITA did in Angola?

### III. Special Interests

Sierra Leone's rebel war was sustained largely by congruence of protagonists' interests in diamonds and other lootable resources and further by private political interests. The army deliberately prolonged and escalated the war to sustain the economic gains derived from diamond mining and looting, squandering of military expenditures and outright collaboration with the rebels for money. "Ghetto" unemployed youths and illicit diamond miners the "san san boys" rushed to enlist on either side with the express purpose of looting and mining. The soldiers were called "sobels"- soldier rebels while looting exercises by the rebels was often code-named "operation pay yourself". Pro-government civil defense militias and foreign troops also sometimes engaged in mining and looting. The diamond rich Kono District and Tongo Fields were lost again and again when either occupying side was surprised by the other while mining. Governments also looted diamonds, notably the (military) National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) (1992-96) whose leader Captain Valentine Strasser allegedly smuggled 435 carats of diamonds to Sweden in 1993<sup>15</sup>. Abraham (1997) argues that a unilateral cease-fire declared by the NPRC in 1993 which enabled the routed rebels to reconsolidate, vindicates the common view that the NPRC did not want to end the war. Also, small and sometimes shady diamond mining companies recruited mercenaries and procured arms for government in exchange for diamond mining concessions.

24. Neighbouring countries-Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso supported the rebels, motivated by the economic benefits from the diamond trade as suggested by substantial diamond exports from Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire which have very little or no diamond endowments. The discrepancy is believed to be due to diamonds smuggled from Sierra Leone and elsewhere. In 1997 for instance, Liberia exported 5,803,000 carats of diamonds to Belgium while Cote d'Ivoire exported 885,000 carats. However estimated production of diamonds in Liberia was only 150,000 carats and virtually nil in Ivory Coast. Furthermore, Liberian diamond exports increased sharply from US\$ 8.4 million in 1988 before the wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia, to US\$ 500 million in 1995 when both countries were experiencing civil war<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, Libyan support for the rebels appears to have been motivated by a desire to spread Colonel Gaddafi's Green Book ideology and revolution.

25. Guinea, bordering Sierra Leone on the north, played a somewhat ambivalent role in the conflict. While for fear of a spillover the government provided troops to fight the rebels, these same troops sometimes "lost" arms and ammunitions to the rebels prompting allegations of a sell-out. Guinean export of diamonds has also been way above domestic production-533,000 carats in 1998 while domestic production was estimated at 205,000 carats. The difference was also believed to have emanated from Sierra Leone (Smillie et al

<sup>15</sup> This allegation appeared in the international press and the New Breed newspaper in Sierra Leone. See also Reno (1995).

<sup>16</sup> From Smillie et al (2000) who give a detailed account of the role of diamonds in prolonging the war.



2000). Furthermore, a booming sanction-busting trade across the Guinean border adulterated international sanctions against the ruling Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) between 1997 and 1998.

26. What was the major interest of Nigeria spearheading the West African Intervention Force, ECOMOG, which countered the rebellion in Sierra Leone? Nigerian intervention in Sierra Leone can be traced to its intervention in Liberia in 1990 using bases in Sierra Leone. However, why did the intervention endure and increase massively over the years in spite of its unpopularity in Nigeria and huge costs – over a million US dollars a day at the height of the crisis? Quest for regional hegemony can be advanced as a more important factor. Another hypothesis is that, ironically, Nigeria sought to improve its battered international image under the despotic Abacha by “promoting peace and democracy” in Sierra Leone. A third hypothesis is that the Nigerian military government was wary of bringing home battle-tested troops for fear of a coup as in the Gambia where Yahya Jammeh returned from ECOMOG mission in Liberia to topple Dauda Jawara. Furthermore, Nigeria’s effort to re-instate Kabba in 1998 and 1999 may have been motivated by the desire to overcome the humiliation of the toppling of a government that Nigerian troops were protecting. Indeed the 1999 campaign was code-named “operation death before dishonour”. Lastly, there is the view that Nigeria was motivated by economic interests with the military government using Sierra Leone as an economic outlet for poorly paid and restless junior military personnel as suggested by reports of looting of diamonds and goods by Nigerian troops (Musah 2000). However, the huge cost of the intervention borne by Nigeria weakens this view.

27. The war spawned a large number of NGOs whose behaviour was sometimes suspect. In January 1999, government expelled five expatriate staff of the International Committee of the Red Cross, on grounds of aiding the rebels. Also, absence of an effective regulatory framework has allowed many NGOs - the main vehicle for donor funding for war-related activities - to raise funds abroad without informing government.

28. There were also domestic political interests prolonging the war reflected by apathy in prosecuting it and aversion towards negotiations. The unpopular All People’s Congress responded complacently to the onset of war, prompting accusations of using the war as a pretext to delay multi-party elections or disenfranchise affected areas in the strongly anti-APC south-eastern regions. Some party functionaries also benefited from misappropriations of huge military expenditures. There is also the hypothesis that self-seeking elements within governments were averse to negotiations because of the consequences: power sharing and possible loss of public office and privileged access to state resources. This explains the reluctance of the Kabba government to negotiate with the RUF after its restoration in 1998 when it was in a strong bargaining position, suicidally maintaining this stance until the rebel re-invasion of Freetown in January 1999<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Evidence of the Kabba government’s reluctance to negotiate includes the flat rejection of negotiation overtures from the Reverend Jesse Jackson, President Clinton’s Special Envoy to Africa, in November 1998, and misleading impressions from government that the war was virtually over, lulling the public into a false sense of security and deflecting pressure to negotiate. In December 1998, just days before the rebel invasion of Freetown, President Kabba declared that the backbone of the rebellion had been broken.

#### IV. External Interventions

External interventions played a critical role in the preparation, onset and sustenance of the war. Gaddafi's Green Book revolutionary ideology inspired youths disillusioned with the corrupt and repressive All People's Congress (APC). Libya financed and provided training facilities in Benghazi for dissidents opposed to the APC before the war (between 1987-88) when the rebels could not access lootable resources. This Libyan pre-war logistical and financial support partly explains why war actually broke out in Sierra Leone and not in other countries facing similar socio-economic conditions. Liberia's rebel leader, Charles Taylor, provided a base and troops-Liberian and Burkinabe, for launching and sustaining the rebellion<sup>18</sup>. These and other foreign mercenaries mainly from Ukraine helped reconsolidate the rebels after being flushed out of Freetown in February 1998, culminating in the re-invasion of Freetown in January 1999. Cote d'Ivoire hosted Foday Sankoh.

30. Pro-government external interventions-the Nigerian-led ECOMOG and mercenaries-were mixed blessings. ECOMOG gained widespread popularity for gallantly flushing out the rebels from Freetown in 1998 to reinstate Tejan kabba, and lost it following the easy rebel comeback, culminating in the re-invasion of Freetown in January 1999. Though Executive Outcomes mercenaries prevented the rebels from taking Freetown in 1995, repulsing their advance some thirty miles from the city; and Sandline mercenaries provided Tejan Kabbah's government in exile with arms (against a UN embargo) and assisted ECOMOG in re-instating it<sup>19</sup>- the result has been hasty give-away diamond mining concessions, mortgaging the country's diamond resources, and possibly posing legal and security problems upon invoking. The fiscal costs were also high - 1.7 million dollars a month for Gurkha Security Guard mercenaries and roughly the same for Executive Outcomes mercenaries. Furthermore, "pro-government" mercenaries may face the incentive to create or perpetuate the situation of insecurity necessitating their employment. Moreover, touted as a preferred alternative to negotiations, external interventions induced a tendency to not negotiate. In the run-up to the re-invasion of Freetown in January 1999, government falsely boasted of a massive ECOMOG troop build-up, deflecting growing concerns for negotiations with the rebels. The presence of ECOMOG also lulled the Kabbah government into security complacency. It failed to quickly reconstitute a new army after disbanding the old army until the wake-up call came when the rebels re-invaded Freetown in January 1999.

#### V. External Agencies and the Search for Peace

Although the international community demonstrated prolonged apathy in Sierra Leone's rebel war, and the Western countries a clear intention of not intervening militarily - in sharp contemporaneous contrast to the war in Kosovo - external

<sup>18</sup> Abdullah (1997) speaks of a deal between Foday Sankoh and Charles Taylor: Sankoh and his group would help Charles Taylor "liberate" Liberia after which Taylor would provide Sankoh with a base to launch his "revolution".

<sup>19</sup> This later blew up into the "Arms for Africa Scandal" implicating the British government.

agencies-ECOWAS, UN, Commonwealth, OAU, UK and US, eventually catalyzed the search for peace culminating in the signing of the Lome Peace Accord in July 1999. The role played by external agencies consisted in pressuring both sides to negotiate and reach an agreement, and funding and facilitating the peace talks hosted by ECOWAS. Furthermore, external agencies were given an official role in the agreement-funding, provision of an 11,000 man UN peace-keeping force, re-training of combatants under the disarmament programme, and serving as moral guarantors to the agreement.

31. Prior to the Lome Peace Accord external agencies made two major attempts at negotiating an end to the conflict culminating in the Abidjan Peace Accord of 1996 and the Conakry Peace Plan of 1997. External agencies also provided humanitarian relief assistance throughout the war while UNDP assisted government to prepare for post-conflict management through technical assistance. The UK and EU have been assisting in rehabilitating government administrative machinery and restructuring the police and army. The international financial institutions have been providing budgetary and balance of payment support.

32. International support is crucial to consolidate peace and facilitate national reconstruction in Sierra Leone. Given the battered state of the economy, donor funding is indispensable to implement the various provisions of the agreement particularly the critical disarmament programme, and finance poverty alleviation and economic recovery programmes. The global experience and networks of agencies like the UNDP and World Bank in peace building and post-war reconstruction would also benefit Sierra Leone tremendously as would technical assistance to improve government's limited administrative capacity. The presence of external agencies as moral guarantors to the peace accord would help overcome the potential time-inconsistency problem emanating from mutual distrust between government and the rebels, and also lend credibility to the general elections in 2001- a major test of the peace process.

## VI. Conclusion

This paper has shown that the root cause of Sierra Leone's rebel war was Siaka Stevens' personalized dictatorship from 1968-85 which exploited malleable political institutions for power and wealth using corruption and violence, entrenching patrimonialism and disabling agencies of restraint and institutions for conflict management. The proximate causes-economic decline, widespread poverty, high youth unemployment, violation of the rule of law, government dysfunction, rural isolation and regional and ethnic grievances, produced a growing army of potential rebels mobilized towards civil war with Libyan and later Liberian support. Congruence of protagonists' diamond and other interests sustained the war while external interventions reinforced a collapsing state but tended to delay a negotiated settlement. Sierra Leone's tragic experience shows that where political institutions are weak, endowment of lootable natural resources like diamonds can be a curse and not a blessing to a country, offering little economic benefits to the people in times of peace and triggering and sustaining pernicious civil war.

34. While the Lome Peace Accord offers hope for a definitive end to one of Africa's most brutal civil wars and relaunching development activities in a country with so much "unfulfilled potential", considerable risks lie ahead-a rebel force largely intact with the

disarmament programme way behind schedule, a weak government, and extremely high levels of poverty and unemployment, all amidst abundant lootable natural resources.

35. Certain measures will reduce these risks and facilitate national reconstruction. Macrosecurity can be improved through the following measures: completion of the disarmament programme to reduce the threat of resumption of the war by rebels still holding out in the bush; consolidating the country's fledgling democracy to serve as an agency of restraint and guarantee respect for the rule of law; nurturing agencies of restraint and key institutions for conflict management-civil society, the judiciary and the police; and decentralisation of power to permit wider participation in governance while reducing rural isolation. Increased budgetary allocation for the rural sector will further promote rural development.

36. Sierra Leone's primordial development challenge has always been to utilize its abundant natural wealth to eradicate widespread poverty and promote human development. Indeed, poverty alleviation will deter conflict by increasing its opportunity cost. Private sector development will be critical to confront this challenge, given weak government institutional capacity and the primordial role of the private sector in the economy - accounting for over 90 percent of both employment and GDP. However foreign dominance of key economic sectors warrants encouraging greater indigenous participation in business. Restoring private sector confidence will be critical for attracting investment and encouraging return of repatriated capital. To increase trust in the short run, government will need to encourage a speedy return to the market through measures aimed at reducing transaction costs such as rehabilitation of transport and communication facilities. Given the high illiteracy rate, low cost basic education will be a high investment priority for improving the human resource base. The centrality of youths in the conflict warrants special attention to the problem of youths in Sierra Leone. Employment opportunities can be increased through further restructuring of the educational system towards emphasis on technical education. Other problems like drug abuse will also need to be addressed. Above all, sound management of diamond and other natural resources is crucial to reduce poverty and eliminate the incentive for rebellion. Returning to the chaotic pre-war free for all status quo is a recipe for future conflict. Corporationalization of exploitation of diamonds will facilitate monitoring and permit realization of a greater share of the benefits.

37. Interventions on both sides of Sierra Leone's civil war from the West African sub-region and the unwillingness of Western countries and the UN to intervene militarily highlight the importance of regional cooperation in preventing and ending African civil wars. The key role of the wider international community in consolidating peace in Sierra Leone consists first in funding and technical support for post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction, particularly the disarmament component, provision of the promised 11,000 man peace-keeping force, and serving as moral guarantors to the peace accord and also as an external agency of restraint given the dearth of domestic agencies of restraint. The international community will also need to provide more aid for poverty alleviation and make a more concerted effort to control trade in illegal arms, diamonds and other natural resources fuelling African wars along the lines of current efforts for Angola.

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**Annex 1****Chronology of the war and related events**

- March 1991: Onset of the rebel war. Sierra Leonean fighters of the Revolutionary United Front, supported by rebels belonging to Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia, enter Sierra Leone from Liberia and attack areas in the Eastern and Southern Provinces
- April 29, 1992: Young, disgruntled, junior ranking soldiers protesting neglect at the war front overthrow President Momoh's All People's Congress, setting up the National Provisional Ruling Council, headed by Captain Valentine Strasser
- 1995 : Executive Outcomes mercenaries repulse a rebel advance on Freetown
- January 1996: Palace coup: Captain Strasser is replaced by his deputy, General Maada Bio
- February 1996: General and presidential elections, subsequently won by Tejan Kabba's Sierra Leone's People's Party
- March 1996: Inauguration of President Kabba
- November 1996: Signing of abortive Abidjan Peace Accord between government and the Revolutionary United Front
- March 1997: Arrest of Foday Sankoh in Nigeria ostensibly for carrying Arms
- May 1997: Overthrow of Tejan Kabba by the army and establishment of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council in coalition with the Revolutionary United Front
- October 1997: Signing of abortive Conakry Peace Plan calling for restoration of Tejan Kabbah in six months
- February 1998: Restoration of Tejan Kabbah government
- January 1999: Invasion of Freetown by rebels, repulsed within two to three weeks by ECOMOG
- July 1999: Signing of Lome peace accord to end the war