SAME CAR, DIFFERENT DRIVER? THE IMPACT OF PEACEBUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND THE CHIEFDOM SYSTEM IN SIERRA LEONE

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Abstract

Practitioners and scholars in the humanitarian internationale focus on partnership type as a hedge against many of the traditional challenges and undesirable outcomes associated with peacebuilding. ‘Active’ partnerships are strongly encouraged; ‘dependent’ partnerships are to be avoided. The West African nation of Sierra Leone and its government-sponsored Community-driven Development (CDD) programme are an ideal lens through which to examine whether and how conventional emphasis on partnership type affects peacebuilding outcomes. A political economy analysis of two empirical case studies of CDD from Sierra Leone’s early peacebuilding phase reveals that partnership type is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition to accomplish peacebuilding goals. In both cases, CDD exacerbated social exclusion, especially among ex-combatants and war-affected youth, and failed to enhance meaningfully the skills, capacities and knowledge of local actors. Close attention should be paid to the potential positive and negative spillover effects generated by the intersection of peacebuilding, CDD and the chiefdom system.

Introduction

Contemporary peacebuilding emphasises ‘partnership’ among the actors most closely involved in rebuilding war-ravaged societies – especially between international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and local counterparts. Yet peacebuilding partnership efforts face numerous constraints and challenges, including intense competition for resources, effective project design and negotiation of roles and responsibilities. Many INGOs have married into CDD, whose goals, covered in greater detail below, are to reduce social exclusion and enhance the skills, capacities and knowledge of local actors. While it is seemingly intuitive that ‘active’ rather than ‘dependent’ CDD partnerships would be more likely to yield positive peacebuilding outcomes, the Sierra Leone case reveals that partnership type is neither necessary nor sufficient to accomplish CDD goals. By using a political economy approach to explore more deeply the factors contributing to ineffective peacebuilding partnership outcomes in two early peacebuilding cases, I conclude that the revival of the chiefdom system has played a central role. In part local political and economic actor, and in part centre of peacebuilding gravity, the chiefdom system and chiefdom actors represent a critical yet understudied structural feature in Sierra Leone’s post-conflict peacebuilding landscape.
The article first describes how a political economy approach contributes to our knowledge about partnership type and peacebuilding outcomes in Sierra Leone. The focus turns to an examination of the conventional wisdom in the literature associated with partnership, particularly within the context of CDD in Sierra Leone. The role played by the restoration of the chieftain system in peacebuilding in two peacebuilding cases that represent different partnership types – a CARE programme and a collaborative United States Agency for International Development (USAID) programme – is then examined. Rather than reify partnership type, the lessons from these cases underscore the need to take political and economic factors into greater account in designing, implementing and evaluating peacebuilding programmes. The final section offers prescriptions in this regard and suggestions for future research.

**Political Economy Analysis of Peacebuilding Partnerships**

‘Partnership’, being fundamental to humanitarian and peacebuilding practice (Smillic 2001; UNCT 2006), is understood differently by different organisations (Lewis 1998:504). Ongoing debate surrounds the modalities of partnership, especially between international and local actors; yet the consensus among peacebuilding actors is that partnership, especially participatory partnership, decreases the likelihood of undesirable peacebuilding outcomes. Peacebuilding partnerships can enhance peacebuilding, giving voice and agency to those perceived to be ‘legitimate’ actors in the process (Kemper 2005:36-45; Lederach 1997, 2005; Watchlist 2006). Partnership may also facilitate accountability and transparency among INGOs, and help foster long-term, productive relationships between INGOs and community-level actors. Accordingly, the humanitarian and development literature has delineated partnership types into two broad categories, ‘active’ and ‘dependent’, and promotes the former as contributing to effective peacebuilding and development outcomes (Fowler 1995; Lewis 1998:504-505; Lindenberg & Bryant 2001; Mawdsley *et al* 2002).

‘Active’ partnerships involve strategic, technical, and managerial planning and assistance designed with local input and local decision-making structures. Such partnerships are established through deliberate, collaborative and ‘ongoing processes of negotiation, debate, occasional conflict, and learning through trial and error’; risks are taken and although the roles and purposes of partners are clear, ‘they may change according to need and circumstance’ (Lewis 1998:504). ‘Dependent’ partnerships often by-pass local knowledge and instead utilise concepts and ideas about peacebuilding that emanate largely from the North and the INGO knowledge economy (Mawdsley *et al* 2002). They are characterised as having a ‘blueprint character’, are implemented alongside ‘rigid assumptions’ about comparative advantage and are typically correlated with levels of funding (Lewis 1998:504).

Where partnerships are viewed as an opportunity for capacity building, the literature suggests dependent partnerships frustrate this goal. Such partnerships fail to leverage the knowledge and experience that local actors possess. In addition, the flow of inputs such as skills, expertise and funding in dependent partnerships is often criticised as being unidirectional – from North to South or international to local. (Lewis 1998:505). Finally, scholars caution that the impact of dependent partnerships will be short-lived and unsustainable; once the formal partnership dissolves, the resource flow is halted and the local actors are left no better off than before (Lewis 1998:505).
Thus the literature encourages active rather than ‘dependent’ partnerships between INGOs and local actors. This may be due to the prevailing orthodoxy that has emerged about capacity building and ‘participatory’ peacebuilding strategies currently favoured by many donors and INGOs (De Coning 2007:11, 15-18). However, both types of partnership can be found across transition settings and ‘partnership moments’ abound at various phases of peacebuilding planning and design. During one phase, such as needs assessment, a partnership may seem active while at others (e.g. implementation), it appears dependent. More importantly, and as illustrated below, both partnership types can and do lead to undesirable peacebuilding outcomes. This would suggest that partnership type might matter, but perhaps not in the way that the conventional literature currently claims.

The perceived costs and benefits associated with active and dependent partnerships vary tremendously, but it is necessary, albeit difficult, to disentangle the factors associated with implementing one type or another. For example, it may be cost-beneficial for INGOs to practise dependent partnerships to maintain control over programme implementation and reporting, regardless of whether the standards to which local partners are held are legitimate, appropriate or feasible (Fanthorpe 2003:4). In some cases, active INGO-local actor partnerships result in a brain drain of the best and brightest local actors (Pfeiffer 2003). In other cases, investing in active partnerships can be equated with delays in delivery, degraded aid effectiveness and tension between community-driven and donor-driven accountability demands. Partnership type should therefore be problematised analytically to better understand whether, how and under what conditions it affects peacebuilding outcomes (Lindenberg & Bryant 2001). Because partnerships are not maintained in a vacuum, careful analysis of the political and economic factors characterising a conflict transition setting is necessary to assess their impact on INGO-local actor partnerships and, ultimately, yield conclusions regarding whether and how they contribute to peacebuilding outcomes.

Evidence from a political economy approach to examine outcomes associated with partnership type in two peacebuilding cases suggests that dependent and active partnerships are both susceptible to political and economic factors in ways not always anticipated by peacebuilding actors. These factors tend either to exacerbate undesirable outcomes, as in cases of dependent partnerships, or dilute and distort the positive qualities associated with active partnerships. In either case, unforeseen outcomes have resulted. This approach allows researchers to explore interactions between political and economic processes and structures in a post-conflict transition setting and helps explain various outcomes resulting from those processes (Collinson 2002). Because it emphasises the intersection of a variety of interests, a political economy approach also allows researchers to identify the critical stakeholders in peacebuilding. It may also help investigators identify when strategies and conditions on the ground (e.g. partnership types) will be incompatible with desired results. It is critically important to ask how and why partnerships are formed between international and local actors to achieve peacebuilding goals, who gets to establish those goals, what the stakes are, and what political and economic factors influence the achievement of those goals.
Sierra Leone Peacebuilding Gets a New Driver: Chiefdom Actors and CDD Partnerships

Peacebuilding partnership and CDD

Sierra Leone is emerging from more than a decade of civil war in which more than 70,000 civilians were killed and nearly half the population of 4.5 million became internally displaced or fled to neighbouring countries (Hanlon 2005:460). Per capita income was halved among the general population during the war (Humphreys & Richards 2005:12). In the immediate post-conflict transition phase and despite high levels of international, regional and national political will, donor mobilisation and a relatively stable peace, patterns of social exclusion and inequality persist. Many development and social inequality indicators have actually worsened or remain unchanged. The nation hovers near the bottom of the United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Index (UNDP 2002-2007) and has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world. Average life expectancy at birth is 41.8 years. Only 46% of citizens can expect to live beyond 40 years. Economic recovery has been extremely slow; nearly 75% of the population continues to live on less than $2 per day (UNDP 2007). The potentially caustic combination of disaffected youth, lack of future economic opportunities and endemic corruption continues to be cited as the central factor contributing to the nation’s fragile political, security, economic, and social environment (United Nations 2006).

Most scholars would agree that the war resulted from a combination of grievance factors originating from political, social, economic, and cultural ills that were in turn fuelled by greed for lootable resources like diamonds. (Ballentine & Sherman 2003; Berdal & Malone 2000; Berman & Labonte 2006; Chabal & Daloz 1999; Keen 2000, 2001; Reno 1998; Richards 1996, 2003). Many of these factors continue to shape and reshape national strategies for peacebuilding. They include regional distinctions affecting political, economic, and social exclusion; income distribution patterns; and class and urban-rural disparities (Riddell 1985:532-534). Corruption is also a significant challenge. Patron-client relationships run deep and hinder the development of responsive and accountable political and economic institutions and processes (ICG 2003:19-21).

Moreover, the state’s ability and willingness to ensure social/economic welfare redistribution has been derelict. For example, national development strategies traditionally favoured foreign direct investment rather than establishing an indigenous economic capacity. Government elites routinely abused welfare resources to gain political support, punish uncooperative elements in society and attract outside economic benefits. Provision of welfare, where it existed at all, was conducted along political patronage lines, leaving large sectors of the population marginalised.

It is therefore unsurprising that Sierra Leoneans have long considered their government to be unable or unwilling to provide for their social welfare and economic development. During the war, social provision and relief were relegated largely to INGOs and funded by foreign governments, which produced an arrangement fraught with tensions. The government often accused INGOs of deliberately bypassing line ministries and coordination structures. Many INGOs deliberately avoided working with government officials or line
ministries, considering them to be nearly as big a threat to the humanitarian relief system as the rebels (Sommers 2000:28-30).

Peacebuilding programmes in Sierra Leone are being carried out by some 11 UN agencies, nearly 40 INGOs and more than 24 national NGOs (UNOCHA 2007; Sierra Leone Information System 2006). INGOs play a key role in this process. This reflects two key realities of the local political and economic landscape. First, the government lacks the technical and material capability to manage and implement the peacebuilding effort; it needs partners with demonstrated capacity. Second, INGO involvement reflects external donor preferences and reassures donor nations that aid will not disappear into a kleptocracy because civil servants are grossly underpaid and the lure of graft is prevalent (UNCT 2006:10). Donors have committed hundreds of millions of dollars in humanitarian and peacebuilding assistance (UNDP 2006). Between 2002 and 2005, Sierra Leone also received $131.3 million in interim external debt relief via the World Bank’s Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (United Nations 2006). The UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone was established in 2005, marking an innovative approach to peace consolidation in post-conflict transitions. Sierra Leone is also one of two countries to fall under the purview of the recently established UN Peacebuilding Commission.

The government manages peacebuilding and CDD in parallel with the decentralisation of governance, and the national strategy delegates peacebuilding to the local level and partnerships between INGOs and local actors. CDD is promoted by international donors like the World Bank⁶ and the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID). The CDD premise is that local actors and community groups are best positioned to articulate peacebuilding needs and priorities; that planning and investment decisions about resource distribution should directly involve local communities; and that all peacebuilding efforts should be transparent and represent the views of traditionally less powerful groups in the community (King 2005:151; ActionAid et al 2007; World Bank 2006, 2007). CDD also features prominently in the National Social Action Project (NSAP), which forms one strand of the government’s Transitional Support Strategy for post-war recovery, economic and social development and poverty alleviation.⁷ The Sierra Leone government fully supports the use of liaison committees at the chiefdom level to implement active peacebuilding partnerships that will create local economic development opportunities, and give greater voice to local populations in the rebuilding of their communities.

The initial response of local communities to the early peacebuilding phase has been mixed. Some INGO-led programmes were criticised for being ill timed and poorly planned (King 2005:156-157). Others were criticised for inadequate funding and failing to involve local counterparts. Where INGO peacebuilding assistance lacked breadth and depth, local resentment emerged. For example, one rural leader claimed ‘his chiefdom had seen little NGO activity compared to chiefdoms and towns with better political connections’ (Collinson 2002:15).

INGOs continue to participate in CDD with the understanding that active partnerships will result in more effective peacebuilding outcomes. But many challenges to achieving active partnerships remain and in some cases, dependent partnerships are still the norm
(Richards et al. 2004:39-40). In spite of the prevailing views in the literature on the advantages of active partnership over dependent ones, close analysis reveals, that generating positive peacebuilding outcomes is not contingent on partnership type alone. The impact of the restoration of the chiefdom system, which represents a political and economic institution that intersects in important ways with peacebuilding in Sierra Leone, must be analysed to assess the potential of partnership types to contribute to desired CDD outcomes.

**Restoration of the chiefdom system**

Among former President Kabbah’s initial pledges after being elected in 1996 was to revive the chiefdom system, which was seriously weakened in many parts of the country during the civil war. Introduced by the British as a means of indirect rule, the system was based on rural governance through a hierarchy of traditional chiefs. The chiefdom system has always been linked to rural political power, and national politicians have leveraged this power historically to ensure critical electoral support (Jackson 2007). Supported financially by DFID and designed in cooperation with the Kabbah government, the Paramount Chiefs Restoration Programme (PCRP) restored 149 paramount chiefs between 2000 and 2002 (Fanthorpe 2003:8-9, 11-12; Jackson 2007).

The restoration of chiefs became increasingly important symbolically and strategically as a means to streamline Sierra Leone’s transition to post-conflict peacebuilding. It also is intended to increase political accountability and decentralise administrative and fiscal policy to the district and local levels (Fanthorpe 2006; Jackson 2007; UNCT 2006). However, the government also stands to benefit politically and economically from this arrangement in that chiefdom actor participation in peacebuilding can facilitate formal access to significant resources through CDD (Hanlon 2005:463).

Many scholars remain sanguine about the PCRP, noting that it has failed to ‘encourage citizens to reconsider the modes of domination and governance that had been among the causes of the war’ (ICG 2004:24). Others have described it as a ‘revival of a number of old and frankly inefficient institutions’ (Richards et al 2004:39). Central oversight of the new system is lacking and under-resourced (Jackson 2007). Humphreys and Archibald (2005:19), among others, have suggested that the chiefdom system could render peacebuilding and development at risk of elite capture by ‘ethnicised patrimonialism’. For example, individuals must obtain ‘native status’ through a chief to enjoy certain residential, land use, and political/legal rights (Fanthorpe 2006). Equitable access to land for ‘women without representation’ (e.g. war brides), ‘strangers’ and ‘youth’ is rare under customary legal chiefdom traditions. Thus chiefs determine which individuals and groups are included in society and can accrue resources, and which are excluded. Yet in spite of these inherent structural concerns, the Kabbah government, UNDP, and DFID reached consensus as early as 1998, based on somewhat limited consultations, that the majority of Sierra Leoneans wished to see the chiefdom system ‘returned to its former glory and respect’ and for chiefs to become ‘empowered to play their roles as vehicles of development and progress in their chiefdoms’ (Government of Sierra Leone & UNDP 1999).

The implications of this new feature of the Sierra Leonean economic and political landscape are only just beginning to unfold and be analysed. Some analysts indicate that it is very likely to reshape in fundamental ways how peacebuilding proceeds in Sierra Leone and
the effectiveness of INGO-local actor partnerships in the short and medium term (Hanlon 2005). INGOs working outside the CDD model and/or the chiefdom system will encounter serious difficulties and risk compromising programme effectiveness. Distributing peacebuilding resources without chiefdom actor involvement may be perceived as a direct challenge to local authority and national policy (Fisher 1998:51-54, 61). Similarly, failure by INGOs to grasp whether and how the economic and political dimensions of peacebuilding via CDD are appealing or unappealing to chiefdom actors may also stymie effective programme implementation.

To recap, partnership via CDD and chiefdom actors is the dominant strategy for peacebuilding in Sierra Leone, and because active partnerships are generally perceived to be more effective than dependent ones in generating optimal outcomes, programme design has been closely linked to expectations of outcomes. However, the assumption that active partnerships will increase the likelihood of achieving peacebuilding goals is, in turn, tied to the degree to which peacebuilding resources may be used strategically by local partners to serve their own economic and political goals – goals that may completely contradict INGO peacebuilding goals. In addition, the notion that dependent partnerships will lead to ineffective outcomes should also be problematised. On the one hand and as the cases below illustrate, active peacebuilding partnerships designed to tap the ‘potential’ of local actors but that also involve resources or other features that correlate closely with that map onto chiefdom actor interests can actually increase the chances of elite capture and create undesirable outcomes. On the other hand, dependent peacebuilding partnerships that do not map onto elite actors’ interests can facilitate diffidence and/or reticence and likewise lead to similar outcomes. In both cases, the chiefdom system actors have an interactive effect on peacebuilding partnership type.

**Peacebuilding Partnerships: Two Early Phase Cases**

The following two sub-sections analyse and examine the outcomes of the early phases of two peacebuilding cases. They rely on external evaluations, which present limitations to the conclusions drawn. Because this article focuses on the early peacebuilding phase, it can be considered a first step in engaging a larger research design that studies peacebuilding partnerships in later phases and involves more significant fieldwork. Moreover, locating the analysis at this early stage will provide a foundation to help build a nascent literature in this issue area.

**CARE’s rehabilitative agriculture and seed distribution programme**

Approximately three-quarters of Sierra Leoneans are employed in the agricultural sector and close to one-half of the country’s gross domestic product is derived from primary food production. Donors and the government consider agriculture-focused peacebuilding to be key in providing future employment and economic stability, especially for reintegrated ex-combatants and youth. Many INGOs have designed and carried out programmes in Sierra Leone to promote reintegration, social inclusion and sustainable livelihoods based on a return to agriculture. CARE established a seed distribution programme in selected villages in central districts of Sierra Leone, which provided terrain-appropriate seeds and tools for both household farming and women’s income generation.
In spite of being rights-based and participatory, CARE's active peacebuilding partnership failed in the initial phase because it ignored the potential political and economic distortions that resulted from the influx of resources on chiefdom actors.

(Archibald & Richards 2002). Designing and implementing effective peacebuilding programmes in this sector proved challenging. A number of factors played a role, including the micro-politics of village life under the chiefdom system. Because paramount chiefs retained 'almost unchecked power in rural areas' (ICG 2004:13-14), youth tended to avoid participating in peacebuilding based on agriculture because they believed the structures governing their involvement inhibited their social and economic mobility. Two noted Sierra Leone scholars, Archibald and Richards (2002), evaluated CARE's early peacebuilding programme to determine its initial impact.

CARE's collaboration with local actors on this project was essentially an active partnership. The organisation insisted that programme participants be considered 'citizens claiming a right' rather than beneficiaries of charity or humanitarian largesse. CARE sought active involvement by local actors in programme implementation and established village development committees (VDCs) to manage and oversee seed and tool distribution. CARE envisioned that the participatory VDC structure would allow it to tap local knowledge and 'mobilise local resources and labour for self-help activities' (Richards et al. 2004:24). The VDCs, typically constituted by village elders and others, were charged with identifying and registering programme participants. Notably, CARE attempted to facilitate transparency and accountability by excluding local chiefs from serving on VDCs.

However, the active partnership was weakened by several factors. First, no process was established to ensure that proxies of chiefs were exempted from serving on VDCs. For example, Archibald and Richards (2002:358) noted in some cases that the women serving on the CARE-appointed VDCs may have been either the wives or sisters of chiefdom actors who, through these proxies, could manipulate the programme. Second, the VDC selection process was not fully participatory: members were selected mainly by CARE and endorsed by local communities but were not elected by community members as a group (Richards et al. 2004:25-26). Third, the assumption that VDC members could or would serve on a completely voluntary basis presented challenges to programme effectiveness. 'No one, it was argued, could afford to work for the community welfare for free'; taking one's 'cut' was assumed as a matter of course (Richards et al. 2004:41).

The result of delegating the authority to VDCs to identify and register the 'most needy' in their settlements for receipt of seeds and tools was somewhat predictable. In some cases, the VDC excluded segments of the village population because they were 'strangers', women lacking male 'representation', youths seen to be disrespectful of village chiefs, or individuals lacking 'friends' on the VDC itself (Archibald & Richards 2002:358). In other cases, the evaluation team found that village politics distorted the distribution process and resulted in resources being channelled disproportionately to chiefs and their families. For example, VDC members routinely registered themselves as being the 'most needy' within their communities (Archibald & Richards 2002:358, 360; Richards et al. 25). Distribution inequalities also followed a pre-war pattern of social exclusion by chiefdom actors. Some VDCs resorted to bribery and extortion before granting registration and participation privileges. VDC members were also accused of hoarding, bartering or selling resources (Archibald & Richards 2002:359). In spite of being rights-based and participatory, CARE's active peacebuilding partnership failed in the initial phase because it ignored the potential political
and economic distortions that resulted from the influence of the influx of resources on chiefdom actors. The organisation delegated the lead implementation role to VDCs precisely because of the conventional wisdom regarding the benefits of active partnerships. Yet the political and economic interests of this group directly and indirectly contravened CARE’s programme effectiveness, and its active partnership resulted in undesirable outcomes in the early implementation phase.

CARE’s response was to abandon altogether its targeted partnership with VDCs. It redesigned the programme using a ‘blanket equality approach’ (Archibald & Richards 2002:360-361) to maximise inclusion and self-provisioning capacity. The total amount of seed given to a settlement remained the same as in the former approach, and equal amounts of seed were given to all farm-able household members in a participating settlement. Interestingly, neither CARE’s donor partners nor the Sierra Leone government supported the shift in programme strategy and design, claiming it would dilute the value of the aid and fail to address the greater need of some groups (Archibald & Richards 2002:361). The revised programme was better received by local communities than the initial iteration (Archibald & Richards 2002:364), and further evaluations of its impact are forthcoming.

CARE’s experience is instructive in understanding whether and how partnership type affects peacebuilding outcomes. One lesson is that even peacebuilding partnerships designed to avoid too close an association with chiefdom actors can still be vulnerable to elite capture. Another is found in the legacy of tension that CARE’s programme modifications generated. While the modifications brought visible short-term gains, they are likely to require more, rather than less, interaction with and possible reform of chiefdom actors to create medium- and long-term social equality in the agricultural sector.

**The Youth Reintegration Training and Education for Peace Programme**

Many of Sierra Leone’s displaced are ex-combatants, ‘war-affected youth’, ‘strangers’ and other vulnerable groups. These groups are among the most politically, socially and economically marginalised because they have no familial or kinship links whatsoever to their communities of residence. Their reintegration into society is one of the government’s primary goals, and peacebuilding programmes attempting to make inroads in this area are potentially important contributors to a stable peace. Reintegration programmes are rare because donors are reluctant to be seen rewarding groups like ex-combatants with valuable peacebuilding resources, and the long-term human and financial commitment necessary for programme sustainability often conflicts with short-term donor priorities. Those programmes that do exist are also considered critical to the CDD process.

The Youth Reintegration Training and Education for Peace Programme (YRTEPP) is one of these rare programmes (Hansen et al 2002:28). It was developed by USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) in conjunction with World Vision and its field office in Sierra Leone and Management Systems International (MSI), a consulting firm based in Washington, DC. The goals of the programme included assisting the reintegration of ex-combatants and war-affected communities and providing remedial education and building public support for reconciliation between war-affected youth and ex-combatants (Hansen et al 2002:23). In contrast to CARE’s focus on resources and skills training, YRTEPP focused on the ‘emotional’ or ‘psychological’ dimension of peacebuilding. Like the CARE project,
YRTEPP targeted the 'most needy' individuals who would benefit from the programme – ex-combatants and war-affected youth.

At first glance, YRTEPP could be categorised as an ‘active’ partnership. It held focus group discussions and established education modules covering critical peacebuilding issues. The curriculum was initially based on a participatory, bottom-up methodology that emphasised active learning and literacy, called REFLECT, that had been used in other peacebuilding settings. YRTEPP established a ‘train the trainers’ approach, recruiting learning facilitators (LFs) through community management committees (CMCs) established by World Vision and made up of village elders and elites. The CMCs promoted, managed and monitored YRTEPP in their communities. MSI trained an initial group of master trainers (MTs) who in turn worked with World Vision, CMCs, LFs and participants for the remainder of the programme. Training centres were established where World Vision had operational presence and each programme lasted from six months to a year. In the course of the evaluation period (2000-2002), OTI estimates that some 44,620 individuals participated in the programme countrywide (Hansen et al 2002:25-27).

In effect, however, YRTEPP was a dependent partnership. For example, major stakeholder groups such as the Civil Defence Forces were absent from initial focus group consultations on programme design (Hansen et al 2002:24). Because rapid implementation was a priority, programme module materials were prepared by MSI in Freetown, without substantive local input by war-affected youth or ex-combatants – the very constituents the programme was designed to serve – and were not pilot-tested (Hansen et al 2002:27, 31). Moreover, programme managers replaced the REFLECT curriculum in the final design phase with the less participatory ‘peace education model’. This model is prescriptive and top-down in approach, with low levels of ‘participatory interaction between instructors and students’ (Hansen et al 2002:29). Finally, the cultural context of YRTEPP’s educational modules was distinctly Western. The concepts, symbols and terminology lacked relevance to Sierra Leonean culture and were difficult to learn and teach (Hansen et al 2002:30).

While an evaluation of YRTEPP noted that the programme formally achieved a number of its original goals, it also described many unanticipated and undesirable outcomes that are not attributable to its dependent partnership type alone (Hansen et al 2002:28-33). Partnership type appears to have played less of a role than the programme's poor track record in securing sufficient local buy-in from chieftain actors, represented via the CMCs, which served as local implementing partners. The reasons for this can be traced back to the strategic interests of local governance institutions like the CMCs, the nature of the resources involved, and the unsustainable expectations created among participants by the programme.

As with the VDCs in the CARE project, the CMCs were typically constituted by village elders and community leaders linked closely to chieftain actors. However, unlike VDC members who abused their authority to capture and redistribute programme resources along patron-client lines, CMC members were not paid for their services, received no oversight or management training, and were responsible for a programme with few, if any, material resources that could be co-opted. While CMCs were responsible for selecting LFs and programme participants, eligibility criteria were formulated by YRTEPP, which left little room for elite capture. Moreover, by donor mandate, participation was limited to two groups – ex-combatants and war-affected youth. However, limited access to demobilisation centres during the initial stages of implementation and the trend for combatants to self-demobilise resulted in greater participation in the programme by war-affected youth than by ex-combatants (Hansen et al 2002:26). This further narrowed the
chances that CMCs would be able to utilise their selection process power as a community benefit for privileged or well-connected individuals. And, as noted above, expecting CMC members to volunteer their time and energy without any ‘cut’ of programme resources was not realistic and in the case of YRTEPP, detracted from the general spirit of the programme. A number of CMC members complained that they were not getting anything for their efforts and expressed reluctance to continue participating in the programme (Hansen et al 2002:35-36).

To its credit, and in spite of its dependent partnership design, YRTEPP succeeded in generating widespread interest in community activism and social values among programme participants. Unfortunately, the lack of programme linkages elsewhere in Sierra Leone and the dominance of the chieftdom system in community life have diluted these achievements. YRTEPP evaluators reported growing levels of frustration among participants who had their expectations raised but found no local outlets of support to develop and apply their newly acquired skills. Yet YRTEPP did not engage chieftdom actors on how to overcome these obstacles.

Evaluators also noted that YRTEPP encouraged ‘participants to adopt new attitudes and behaviours without any change in how leadership functions’ in local societies (Hansen et al 2002:30-31, 36). As one LF commented, ‘You cannot sensitize people and then have them live in the streets’ (Hansen et al 2002:30).

The peacebuilding outcomes from YRTEPP have thus been mixed, but should not be patently attributed to partnership type alone. YRTEPP’s dependent partnership design succeeded in achieving many programme goals and minimised elite capture. However, its strategy for addressing the underlying grievance factors affecting participants and the structural dominance of chieftdom actors may exacerbate rather than promote peaceful community relationships between these groups in the future. The mismatch of expectations and reality experienced by YRTEPP participants, resulting from this dependent partnership may lead to more rather than less marginalisation and exclusion in the longer term.

**Conclusion: Keeping the Car on the Road**

The cases examined above are an appropriate lens through which to explore the impact of a key political-economic actor in Sierra Leone society, the chieftdom system, on community-driven development which pairs local actors with international NGOs. The cases also shed light on whether and how partnership type affects peacebuilding outcomes in the early phase of Sierra Leone peacebuilding. Reifying partnership type can be injurious to peacebuilding outcomes unless changes are made to the powers of social inclusion and exclusion that the chieftdom system perpetuates, given the widespread perception that this institution is a legitimate political and economic actor. INGOs are likely to see little ‘empowering’ or ‘capacity building’ among marginalised groups in the absence of careful planning, contingencies, oversight, assessment, and strategic engagement with chieftdom actors during all phases of peacebuilding.

The evidence suggests that active partnerships can create the political and economic space necessary for local actors to exercise some short-term agency in their relationships with local governance structures like the chieftdom system. However, as each case above demonstrates, the lasting effects of both active and dependent partnerships are linked
closely to the level and type of engagement INGOs choose to have with chiefdom actors, who will retain the upper hand in many aspects of peacebuilding based on the CDD model.

By definition, patrimony is unsustainable unless chiefdom actors can distribute patronage, mainly in the form of economic resources, to their communities. Resources associated with large-scale peacebuilding and CDD are, indeed, a contemporary variant of patronage. However, the logic of patron-client distribution includes only those who are deemed to be part of that community structure, either through marriage, representation or historical residency. A key issue INGOs must tackle in their partnerships with chiefdom actors is whether and how historically excluded groups can be reintegrated through peacebuilding and CDD. INGOs in Sierra Leone cannot avoid working with the chiefdom system. However, this fact may have an inhibitory yet rational effect on the establishment of active partnerships, especially in cases where the investment costs are perceived to outweigh the benefits. We may see more instances in which INGOs ‘adhere rigorously to their own standards of accountability and practice in order to insulate themselves’ from the dysfunctional impact of the chiefdom system (Fanthorpe 2003:8).

Dependent partnerships may be the safest peacebuilding strategy for INGOs in Sierra Leone which opt not to engage with chiefdom actors. In their attempts to guarantee against challenges such as elite capture and misuse of resources, donors may demand greater INGO control over peacebuilding inputs. This could translate into undesirable outcomes where chiefdom actors attempt to co-opt active partnerships and could lead to resentment and mistrust among supposed partners. These possibilities could further inject tensions and misunderstanding into the peacebuilding process.

In spite of the numerous challenges it faces, CDD is fast becoming the name of the peacebuilding game in Sierra Leone. It is also inevitable that the chiefdom system will play a significant role in how peacebuilding proceeds. The concepts behind CDD resonate positively with Sierra Leoneans, bilateral and multilateral donors and the government. As noted above, many consider the chiefdom system to be legitimate, even if there are chiefs who abuse their powers (Collinson 2002; Jackson 2007). Knowing this, it would be sensible to map these local political and economic power structures onto our assumptions about partnership type to respond more effectively to the tensions and trade-offs that characterise Sierra Leone’s peacebuilding landscape. While the analysis in this article focuses on the early peacebuilding phase, the findings suggest that additional research into other partnerships on the ground in the current peacebuilding phase is necessary to extend the applicability of lessons learned. However, this may be difficult: INGOs remain ‘under the tyranny of project deadlines, expenditures, targets and accounting requirements’ (Richards et al 2004:51). Nonetheless, further research in this area could help to create best-practice guidelines, encourage new kinds of partnerships, foster conceptual and operational innovation in peacebuilding, and open up a dialogue for local governance reform with chiefdom actors. Ultimately, it has the potential to assist all stakeholders involved in peacebuilding, including donors, INGOs, governments, local NGOs, and perhaps most importantly, local communities.

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Endnotes

1 This article was first presented at the 2006 International Studies Association Annual Conference in San Diego. The author is grateful to Antonio Donini, Larissa Fast, Kurt Mills, Peter Romaniuk, Thomas G. Weiss, and three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments. The phrase ‘Same car, different driver’, is used in a 2004 International Crisis Group report focusing on the challenges of rebuilding failed states.

2 This article uses the term “chiefdom actors” to denote chiefs and those individuals with the strongest chiefdom system ties (e.g. wives and extended families of chiefs) and having direct or indirect access to the political and economic resources many chiefs control.

3 The author thanks an anonymous reviewer for this insight.


5 See Ellis (2001) and Huband (1998) for a compelling treatment of these issues in neighboring Liberia.

6 Nearly 10% of the World Bank’s entire lending portfolio is based on CDD (World Bank 2007).

7 There are four key post-conflict peacebuilding strategies in Sierra Leone, each targeted toward a different recovery timeframe. See Humphreys & Archibald (2005:21) and the NaCSA website, www.nacsa-sl.org/.

8 Chiefs exist at the paramount, district, section, and village levels. Villages are combined into sections and are considered administrative sub-divisions of chiefdoms (Fanthorpe 2003:8-10).

9 The PCRP is also known as the Chiefdom Governance Reform Programme. See Jackson (2007) and UNCT (2006:10-11) on the progress and challenges of chiefdom system expansion.


12 The models are compared in Hansen et al (2002:54-65).

13 This arrangement contrasts with that of the MTs, who were salaried, and LFs, who received modest stipends during training.

References


Humphreys, M. & Richards, P. 2005, Prospects and Opportunities for Achieving the MDGs in Post-conflict Countries: A Case of Sierra Leone and Liberia, New York: Columbia University Earth Institute.


