The Role of Political Leadership in Post Conflict Recovery
The case of Sierra Leone
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INTRODUCTION
The quality of political leadership is critical for fragile states like Sierra Leone that emerge from conflict and must go through a transition phase to the path of sustainable development. Ideally, political leadership should articulate the collective vision of the people for the future of the country and thus lay the foundation for the strong social capital that underpins stability and shared aspirations. It should also be capable of aligning the population and the country’s resources behind that vision. But vision without concrete actions and visible results will quickly lead to disappointments and the vision itself could eventually atrophy. Thus political leadership must also be able to design and implement programmes and policies that make a difference to the lives of the citizens.

For the trust and confidence of the citizenry to be sustained, visible results in terms of equitably and effectively delivering basic goods and services to the population are essential. Fragile states like Sierra Leone, face the triple challenges of having to meet urgent needs of a population emerging out of conflict, avoiding re-emergence of social tensions, while undertaking reform measures and making necessary tradeoffs needed for long-term growth and poverty reduction. And doing so from a lower resource base, and weaker capacity that is usually the hallmark of post-conflict countries.

The paper will describe some of the challenges facing the political leadership in Sierra Leone, and how it attempts to meet those challenges. Focusing on the period after the official cessation of hostilities, the paper will examine how these challenges have affected the provision of public services and simultaneously the process of maintaining or rebuilding trust by the people. With capacity weaknesses throughout the economy, it will assess whether and how political leadership can be strengthened so that the population can have the confidence in them to deliver public services equitably, optimally, and transparently over time. The issue of trust is important in a post conflict situation, since loss of that trust, combined with the inability to effect change in the political leadership peacefully, will encourage if not force, the recourse to violence and conflict.

COUNTRY CONTEXT
Sierra Leone is entering the second cycle of elections for all tiers of government since the end of the conflict. The second Presidential and Parliamentary elections are scheduled for mid August 2007. The elections held immediately after the conflict provided a landslide victory to the ruling party. This was an expression of great hopes and expectation in the leadership. Two years later, the local elections provided signs of erosion in the trust displayed earlier. The Western Area, the capital city, was won by the opposition, in addition to three councils in the North. The ruling party still won fifteen out of the nineteen local councils.

What happened in the intervening period? Was this a case of unrealistic expectations unmet? If so what obstacles confronted the leadership in its efforts to deliver public services? Did the usual post-conflict tensions emerge and reduce the overwhelming trust manifested in the earlier elections? If not, what was responsible for the change?

The paper reviews the factors that constitute the key elements for maintaining trust in the political leadership. In addition to the issue of service delivery, there was also some post conflict tensions that arose during the time, and that was different from the normal tensions found among former belligerents. The situation was further complicated by the tremendous
influence of external actors in the actual and perceived performance of the leadership.

The description and analysis of the role of political leadership in Sierra Leone, suggest that the legacy of past leadership practices, influenced strongly its current capacity. The key challenges that the leadership has had to face include; the very high expectations of the citizenry, the pressure for quick results, the influence of external actors, the shortage – not absence - of local capacity to formulate and implement appropriate reforms, and resource limitations. Reinforcing existing capacity is definitely a first step. However the analysis suggests that managing people’s expectations, combined with a very effective communication strategy are equally important. The reforms underway by the political leadership will take time to yield fruits. Early judgments of failure by other actors – especially foreign partners can be fatal. Given the very fragile nature of the current peace, it’s preservation is essential in order to give space for the longer term actions by the leadership to address the underlying problems that generated the conflict in the first place. However these underlying problems require decisive measures that are bound to upset the status quo. Strong political leadership, backed by a large mandate is the only option for taking the difficult decisions required.

COUNTRY BACKGROUND
Sierra Leone is a small country in the West of Africa with access to the sea, and extensive unexploited mineral deposits. It is better known recently, for the diamonds that fueled the war, and the excesses of the rebels during the conflict. This conflict lasted for ten years from 1991 to 2001. The index of human development in the country worsened during the war that destroyed the social fabric and the economy in general. All economic activity declined significantly and some, such as exports, ceased completely. The destruction of physical infrastructure, displacement of people, rupture of social relations etc left the country as a failed state, with widespread poverty. The intervention of the international community, ECOWAS, UN, and the UK, combined with widespread civil disobedience led to a restoration of a democratically elected government in 2002.
It is important to understand at the outset that in Sierra Leone, political leadership cannot refer only to the head of the party, or only to those in active party politics. The very long period of economic decline in the country preceding the conflict had resulted in different actors from the private sector and technocrats, having to enter the political arena in order to survive and directly influence the behaviour of politicians in the country. This was more than just the creation of alliances with the political leaders in order to survive; it was virtually overt participation. Thus in Sierra Leone political leadership often has a good dose of administrative leaders as well.

A brief review of how the nature of political leadership has evolved in Sierra Leone will provide a useful backdrop to the analysis. The assumption to power of the All People’s Congress led by Siaka Stevens in 1968 marked a major milestone in the political history of the country. This was a first case in sub-Saharan Africa where an opposition political party took the reins of government through the ballot box – notwithstanding the delay due to an intervening period of military rule. The APC then proceeded to consolidate power and carefully even legally – through a referendum - abolished the opposition in 1977. From then on there was increasingly less and less tolerance to dissension over government policy and action. At the same time policies and how they were applied were determined within the party thus excluding others, and the opportunity for widespread ownership.
This dominant role of the party meant that the appointments to key positions in the administration, the judiciary, parliament, and even academia, were increasingly determined
by affiliation to the ruling party. However, it should be pointed out that political affiliation was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for appointment. There was always a dominant group within the party, mainly of similar ethnic origins, that inevitably determined and doled out appointments. Similarly, in the case of parliament, under the one-party state regime, the party selected who got the symbol for the elections and therefore who got elected into parliament. Consequently even from this source, dissenting views were hardly forthcoming.

Throughout the periods of non-military rule, (1957 – 1967, 1968 - 1992 ...,1996 – 1997,), leaders whose appointments were politically influenced were expected to remain loyal to the political system in all its forms. The result was that the majority of the leadership consisted of those who had been able to draw from, be protected by, and therefore form part of, the political party in power. To survive in the pre-conflict era, one had to be politically correctly associated. Thus, while some leaders were more politically active than others, almost everyone in leadership positions had the “correct” political affiliation. By the time the new post-conflict government led by Kabbah assumed power, the practice had become almost a tradition.

This nature of leadership in Sierra Leone was quite similar to that of other fragile states in Africa; the almost two decades of one party politics had left a legacy where many in the higher echelons of leadership were seen as party stalwarts or defenders of the political party in power. To survive, a leader had to be part of the interlocking networks of informal groups. The problem with this system, which is akin to clientelism or patronage, is that it did not necessarily yield the best talents for technical positions. Furthermore it encouraged impunity, condoned inefficiency, and allowed mismanagement and corruption to persist. This system also triggered the exodus of highly trained and qualified personnel from Sierra Leone to seek greener pastures elsewhere.

POST CONFLICT AND THE EMERGENCE OF MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY
A challenge facing the incoming leadership was how to replace this tradition with a system of meritocracy. Similarly, how to encourage the emergence of grass roots leaders for national positions in the party. Linked to this was the political will to dismiss for non-performance or abuse of power etc. It must be pointed out that to do this successfully, in the case of the administration required the presence of a cadre of technicians with the appropriate calibre and ethics from which to choose. However most of the successful technocrats and even businessmen had developed and prospered in the previous era of distorted incentives and inappropriate practices. Their experiences and knowledge, that had become second-nature were not the most appropriate for carrying through the policy reforms envisaged. Hence while everyone decried the corruption, inefficiency and graft that prevailed, few if any refrained from using the same practices to survive, and even prosper.

The provision in the new constitution that allowed the President to appoint his cabinet from outside Parliament was a most welcome aid in breaking the tradition. This gave him freedom to search outside party stalwarts and activists. The first appointments therefore contained a few of non-party activists in key positions. The persistence of a high degree of patronage and clientelism within the system meant that appointments to technical positions, at best were influenced as much by political considerations as by merit. Accountability suffered, as very few of such appointees were relieved of their duties for non, or poor performance. There is no doubt that this has had a negative impact on the leadership’s ability to deliver services promised or expected. The para Statal institutions were the worst hit. This, more than any other reason would explain any erosion of trust by the population. The inability to resolve the electricity, transport – roads, tele-communications, and water supply affected the leadership’s
credibility even more than that of complaints about corruption. In fact the latter is inextricably linked to the former. When roads or other public works, are slow to be rehabilitated or built, when there is a major shortage of water supply, the attention is directed at the responsible head of the relevant entity. Delays to remove, or otherwise sanction, such situations have been partly responsible for some of the criticism levied against the leadership.

It has been argued that the political leadership were subject to pressures that rendered dismissal of party stalwarts difficult. Others argue that the landslide victory gave a virtual carte blanche that could have been used without negative consequences, to dismiss for non-performance. In other words the wider public would have been sympathetic to such moves, which in turn would have been in the longer term interest of the party.

It is recognized that appointment of party stalwarts is not unique to Sierra Leone. For the system to function without negative results, the political leadership should be prepared to dismiss appointees who fail to perform. However this is rendered more difficult because of the system of informal networks that dominate social and even economic relations.

THE CONFLICT AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP
Another issue concerns whether the conflict itself destroyed political leadership and if so what form has the emerging political class assumed? To answer the question, one should examine what constitutes political leadership in the country now.

As resources and opportunities dwindled in the period preceding the conflict, politics influenced if not determined successful leadership in most spheres of life. Political leadership therefore, cannot be confined to leaders of political parties or similar organizations. The Sierra Leone experience shows that when a conflict lasts as much as ten years, following many more years of economic decline earlier, the distinction between political and other forms of leadership especially, administrative leadership becomes blurred. So the examination of the role of political leaders embraces a wider spectrum of leadership. Political leadership was not destroyed by the conflict. The resumption of party politics after the conflict suggests that at worse the leadership was in hibernation during the conflict. As in cases of external threats, all parties virtually were united in the face of the enemy and there was a convergence around the goal of ending the war and repelling the rebels. The current political preparations for the elections confirm that the leadership was not destroyed by the war. The old leaders still have a strong influence in the main political parties. Besides, the new leaders emerging have not demonstrated any significant differences from the earlier ones. The major difference about current leadership is found in the systems that have now been, and are being put in place for better governance and management. Although it is still early, there are signs that these are beginning to affect patterns of behaviour.

POLICY REFORMS AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP
Policy reforms from this leadership group, possessing the characteristics mentioned earlier, have proven to be very slow to implement. The evidence on the ground is instructive. There

1 The USA is the best example.

2 Informal networks exist in every society. In Sierra Leone, there is a tendency for them to replace formal structures thereby marginalizing the latter.

3 Balogun and Gberie, Assessing the Performance of the long Term Partnership Agreement between the Government of Sierra
has been considerable progress in adopting policies and systems, particularly in financial management at the national level, in governance, and in the setting up of some key institutions. Yet this has not led to the fundamental changes that the implementation of these reforms should produce. It can be argued that the visionary leadership of the President forced the adoption of these systems but deficiencies at the lower levels of leadership resulted in a slow trickling down of the effects of these reforms or their application. It must be admitted that five years may be quite short for results to be evident. Nevertheless, the attitudinal changes expected from those who are to implement the reforms are still not yet visible, and the improvements in service delivery slow to appear. The vast majority of state-run institutions are running at a loss and not providing efficient services. Yet they continue to be led by the same people. The much talked about civil service reform is not yet underway. All of this is to suggest that the nature of leadership, its history and evolution posed serious problems in the adoption and implementation of the policy reforms urgently required in a post-conflict economy.

The provision of efficient and effective service by the political leadership is often a function of the capacities of those in authority, political will, and the instruments and mechanisms available for exercising such leadership. In the case of Sierra Leone, what were the levels of capacity and what remedial measures were taken or could have been taken, are questions that may provide answers useful for applications in other situations.

**CAPACITY ISSUES**

Turning to the level of capacity of the leadership, it should be pointed out that the declining fortunes of the country that spanned a decade and a half, 1980 -1996, had acted as a push factor to the best of its trained personnel and part of its leadership as well. The system in place, especially in the adminsitration, effectively de-skilled many of those who had not emigrated, due to the absence of challenges and incentives for improvement, combined with limited exposure to modern management systems and practices. The politicization of the administrative leadership cadre described earlier, resulted in a reduction of the capacity levels of the public servants who in turn were expected to deliver the services promised by the political leaders. In this context, the challenge of the political leadership is therefore how to reinvigorate and unleash the latent capacity in the public service that may have been marginalized in the process of politicization. This may well be more a matter of political will than capacity per se. Nevertheless recognition and understanding this phenomenon, as well as designing appropriate solutions, can only come from good political leadership. In Sierra Leone, there is room for reinforcement of the capacity of the political leadership, and training in modern methods of good leadership for different roles is sorely needed.

In recognition of this lacuna, there was and still is, a plethora of seminars, workshops, etc. on leadership that are organized by Civil Society funded externally. This is combined with de facto unstructured and ad hoc accountability measures taken by CSOs to hold leaders to account. The successes of these initiatives are limited because of their haphazard nature, the sources of funding, and the actors involved.

It is argued that Leadership will have to be reinforced from outside, or that the injection of a good dose of expatriate leaders is therefore necessary for launching and sustaining reforms.
Two options are possible; donor inspired – technical assistance, or the return of Sierra Leoneans from the diaspora. It is now accepted that the introduction and successful application of reforms from outside fail when these are primarily donor directed. The Structural Adjustment carrot and stick approach failed. The earlier free flowing technical assistance supported-aid of the sixties and seventies did not produce much either. In Sierra Leone, despite the efforts to press for reforms by donors, using “benchmarks”, with some aid as the carrot, the results have been less than expected. This is partly because of over-ambitious targets, partly due to flawed approaches imposed from outside, partly because of ownership issues, partly due to capacity constraints, and partly due to low levels of commitments by the local bureaucracy. In all cases, the political leadership has a responsibility to ensure that reforms are carried through.

Beginning with the issue of local ownership and commitment, the extent of the entrenchment of the networks that thrived on siphoning state resources was consistently underestimated. The same actors, who benefited from the dysfunctional institutional and other arrangements, were expected to dismantle these networks and apply more modern transparent and effective policy reforms. This is not to say that there are no change agents in the administrative leadership class, rather they may not constitute a critical mass to take reforms through. By and large, the overwhelming majority was satisfied with the status quo, or is finding ways of compromising new arrangements. It is therefore not surprising that change has been slow.

This leaves the option of returnees from the diaspora, with a change agenda. There is evidence that in Latin American countries in the 80s and 90s, the architects of successful reforms were those educated abroad who had returned home. However, this is not without its own challenges. Resentment and rejection can quickly occur when the returnees fail to adopt a humble approach, or are unable to exercise patience with the slow pace and relatively old methods of doing things. Local sensitivities including ethnic origins can easily derail well thought-out plans for the injection of new ideas by expatriate nationals. Also not all expatriate nationals can perform public sector duties.

There is now growing evidence of an alliance emerging between the potential agents of change, scattered in various institutions on the one hand, and a group of expatriate returnees some from international organizations, some from the private sector, on the other, which together may well constitute this critical mass to carry reforms forward. So far this is not organized and occurs by coincidence at various levels. The dilemma is that if it is organized, it would be considered a threat. Yet not organizing the group reduces its effectiveness. Events in the next year or so will determine how it will unfold.

Turning to political leaders in the strict sense, a growing divide is becoming apparent. Consistent with the demographic profile of the country – a young population with over 70% below the age of 35, political leadership appears to be divided into the young, forty years and below, and the older generation of well known names and who are generally around fifty five years and above. While the younger group is anxious for change, their limited exposure to modern methods and policy making may generate its own problems. The young feel that the older leadership has failed and now the young should be given an opportunity.

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4 The Shakled Continent – Robert Guest, 2004

5 Professors from universities do not always make the best public servants
The traditional authority of the Chief in the rural setting may well alienate some of the young in the rural population. At the same time the shift away from centralisation of authority in Freetown to decentralization has left some grey areas in district and chiefdom administration etc. These issues are likely to have an impact on political leadership at the local level.

Thus five years after the conflict may be too early to speak of a change in this tradition. In reality however, Leadership still includes some of those who wielded power under the old regime as well as those who are sympathetic to the new political leadership. This in turn results in some tensions, the old versus the new, that when combined with the tensions, produced by change, that inevitably arise during the recovery process itself, the effectiveness of the Public Service is reduced. In short, the politicization of non-political leadership positions contributed to the tensions within the public service that affected the speed and effectiveness in implementing reforms.

Tensions
In general, after a conflict, tensions arise from the behaviour of the former belligerents. A case in point is the recent event in the DRC. In the weeks that followed the elections, there were skirmishes and tensions surrounding J-P Bemba, a former rebel leader who had lost the elections and had accepted the results.

In the case of Sierra Leone, the rebel group RUF, were given free access and allowed to occupy the posts agreed on at the Peace conference. The time between the cessation of activities and the holding of the general elections was short. In a way this reduced the possibilities for the usual tension to become deep-seated, particularly as the rebels were not very popular and had not had time to develop a mass following.

Instead, the old party divisions are appearing again and it is instructive that the current elections are being contested along the earlier party lines. This further confirms that the conflict was not rooted in political divisions; indeed all political groups suffered.

The Sierra Leone case presents some interesting departure from the normal path of recovery and its related tensions. To illustrate, the establishment of a Special Court led to new tensions emerging from within the pro-democracy and anti-rebel groups. There was a strong view that the establishment of the Court was superfluous since there was already the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The arrest of the Kamajor leaders, who had resisted the rebels and so supported the government, by the Special Court was seen as ingratitude to those who had taken up arms to defend the democracy and the state. So that the challenge of managing tensions, took a form different from the normal case of the tensions between the former

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6 In the case of the DRC, had the elections been held much earlier, the rebels would have had little hopes in the polls. The long period before the elections for example gave Bemba the space to regain support in places like Kinshasa which was a Kabila stronghold – a place the former had refused to go to after the peace deal because of fear for his safety.

7 This further confirms that the conflict was not rooted in political divisions; indeed all political groups suffered.
belligerents. In the case of Sierra Leone, the tension which arose broke the ranks of one group. There was the difficult choice between impunity and gratitude for the heroism of the resistance, and the importance of sending a strong message that would also be a deterrent for the future.

**EXTERNAL ACTORS AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP**

The challenges posed by the increasingly sophisticated current global economy to the leadership of a post-conflict developing economy also affected or influenced the challenges of managing tensions arising from within the country. In fact it can be argued that a proper understanding of the interplay of forces in the international economy and how these affect the fortunes of a small state will enable local politicians to manage externally induced tensions. Furthermore the actions of the international community, as represented locally also affected both positively and negatively the performance of political actors.

Parliament increasingly has to approve laws on the environment, patents, WTO participation, the extractive industries etc. These require adequate briefing of politicians by staff. There is only a handful of staff for the entire parliament. Library facilities or access to the internet are all extremely limited, if any. The result is that the debates on such matters are hardly profound. Consequently, presenting the decisions in terms that illustrate how the longer term interests of local groups have been taken into account becomes difficult. Low salaries and inadequate or no logistics support for staff in parliament do not help either.

Another area of concern are cases where the international community inadvertently create space for spoilers in the guise of leveling the playing field, at such an early stage in the re-creation of the state. One practice with serious implications is the interference with the natural process through which political leaders emerge and succeed. This takes the form of financing and the creation of space for elements in the so-called civil society to play what are essentially political roles. Young and promising nationals are recruited into externally well funded NGOs, both local and international, with resources and facilities unavailable to government staff. Depending on the nature of the subject matter, these NGO leaders are suddenly thrust into the national scene to discuss issues with the political leaders. The problem is that often the issues are political in nature and whereas the political leader has a constituency of the population whose interest he/she represents, this is not so for the NGO leader. The NGO leader can claim to represent the voiceless – often faceless! The latter submits reports to its external financiers and to its members only. This is creating an anomalous situation in which the role of the elected leader and that of the leader of the CSO is getting increasingly unclear. The point being made here is that unfettered funding of CSOs do have unintended consequences that need to be mastered and measures taken to deal with them.

The issue of donor influence on policy and the extent to which it introduces distortions to the vision of the political leadership is worth mentioning. The high degree of dependence on donor funding has led to a high dependence on donor policy prescriptions and their related “benchmarks”. There are several cases of unrealistic benchmarks accepted by the nationals, in order to access funds. Obviously, failure to achieve these benchmarks is then trumpeted as failures of the political leadership. A case in point concerns anti corruption activities. The lack of convictions for high profile cases in court is seen as lack of political will, when in fact the reason appears to be more related to capacity weaknesses in the police and judiciary. Another example is the case where the leadership tried to secure support for immediate action to deal with youth unemployment. Donors created bureaucratic obstacles arguing that only longer term solutions should be applied. But longer term solutions relate to the revitalization of the economy, a long and slow process! Frustrated, the government had to depend on its own

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8 The rate of unemployment is estimated to exceed 70%, and includes ex-combatants.
resources to launch a Youth Employment Scheme. The paradox is that donors are quick to incite incantations of “national ownership”, “alignment of donor support with government policies” etc. The reality is that the negotiation across the table is between unequal partners, and the party with the purse strings always considers its views the correct one. The political leadership has had to contend with these issues, and at the same time deal with the impressions created in the eyes of the public when disagreement with donors ruptures donor/government relations.

Leadership and Accountability.
A discussion on the role of political leadership cannot be complete without treating the twin issues of accountability and transparency. Here while a number of systems have been put in place to ensure an acceptable degree of both issues after the conflict, questions remain regarding the political will, the administrative capacity, and the resources required to make these systems effective.

Before the conflict, the confidence in political leaders had been eroded by blatant evidence of abuse of power, nepotism and a general lowering of integrity and ethics. When the then head of state, Siaka Stevens remarked that a cow is expected to feed where it is tethered, this was the green light for widespread pilfering of public assets. Combine with this, the impunity of the leadership that spanned a long period of time – over thirty years – will give an insight into the extent of the crisis of leadership in the country.

The election of the former UN official led to the adoption of measures to deal with issues of integrity, ethics and accountability. There was a Commission set up to deal with Corruption; there was a clear attempt to deal with impunity as some high officials were arraigned in court; the police force was given a face-lift by the appointment of British Technical Assistance officer until a Sierra Leonean was hand picked and trained to replace him; and above all there were impressive strides in public financial management.

These measures are taking a long time for the effects to be felt and are therefore seen by some as inadequate and unappreciated by the population, not least because they have not been accompanied by a major improvement in the delivery of key services. Thus although there were major improvements in the number of schools built and teachers received their salaries, other areas experienced major shortfalls. Electricity production fell to an all time low of 130 GW hr in 2005 and declined to less than 30GW hr in 2006. Sanitation was a problem until the end of 2006, the decentralization was experiencing teething problems, etc.

The relative ineffectiveness of the anti corruption measures taken so far can be explained partly by capacity weaknesses in the police and judiciary. In 2006, successful high profile cases of corrupt officials were few and far between. Although new procurement laws have been adopted, compliance to the new rules is increasing only slowly.

Information systems for accountability. There are a number of systems being put in place for better economic governance. These include the system of Results Based Management that requires all MDAs to report quarterly on the development results being achieved. The submission of the reports is followed by full-day meetings in which the Ministers and their heads of departments present their reports for discussion with the Vice President in the chair.

9 It is interesting to note that for countries classified as in crises, there is tremendous difficulty in getting outstanding staff from donor institutions to be assigned there. This is because such duty stations are considered difficult, families are not allowed etc. Thus the staff representing donor institutions is not always the best of the crop. Yet they are the ones wielding almost supervisory authority over a government plagued with capacity weaknesses.
As the system matures and the offices become computerized, this will provide a comprehensive instrument for information dissemination, and for strategic management. Eventually it is expected that this will also be used for effective performance assessment and output-budgeting. In addition there is a Public Expenditure Tracking Survey that traces, through surveys, the path of public expenditure and the extent to which the services reach their destination. This is still in its early stages. Similarly, a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation system is under preparation. Again this is not yet fully operational. These and other systems are only now being installed. Nevertheless they all represent a potential for major strides in transparency and accountability.

Some rules and codes of conduct have been instituted to encourage ethical behaviour, transparency, and greater accountability. One such measure is the requirement for disclosure of assets to Parliament by senior public officials. Here is another example of an excellent system but rendered ineffective because of the absence of a monitoring mechanism. All the above systems require a level of capacity to function effectively. This is not yet available.

The bottom line however is that full democracy requires that all the aspects of democracy; institutions, practices, etc., function reasonably well. The judiciary must be independent; there must be freedom of speech and association, reasonable expectation that governments can be changed through the ballot box and so on. However the importance of the degree of interdependence of all dimensions of democracy is often under-estimated. Isolating one or a few anti-democratic practices etc in order to apply remedial measures often fail and sometimes can even be counterproductive. Anti-corruption efforts are unlikely to lead to large scale success in the short run because the independence of the judiciary, the capacity for prosecutions in the law officers department, the ability of the police to investigate thoroughly etc are all in the process of rehabilitation, with a long way to go. This explains partly the relatively large number of cases that do not lead to convictions in Sierra Leone. The dilemma then lies in the necessity to deal with all aspects at the same time yet without the resources being available to do so. Sierra Leone’s leadership is faced with this challenge; an onslaught on all fronts versus targeted interventions. At the same time there is pressure for accelerating the speed of reforms. What has become clear is that, the attack must be maintained for a long time. Recent impatience by a key donor and threats to terminate support to the Anti Corruption Commission is an error that could be disastrous to the onslaught on corruption.

Managing Expectations
How has the government handled the high expectations from a population that enjoyed the lowest level of human development even before the war, and now expects that after the war their situation will see a marked improvement? The landslide elections victory enjoyed by the leadership immediately after the conflict was not only a reflection of trust, expectations were very high. But were these realistic? The restoration of civilian authority after the conflict encouraged IDPs and refugees to return to their communities that had been destroyed during the conflict. At the time there was abundant aid flowing into the country. As the aid dried out, their disillusionment became apparent. This is particularly true in the largely cosmopolitan Western Area which had experienced a massive influx from the rural areas. A parallel with the post independence optimism may be drawn here. After independence there was a belief that massive transformation will occur based on the existing post-colonial framework. The structural weaknesses in the foundation for socio economic growth quickly gave way to declining growth rates about fifteen years later. Similarly after the conflict,
everyone expected that the economy which had been in the doldrums for over two decades
could be magically revitalised. While so far, 2002 -2006, the growth rates have been
impressivne averaging over 7% in the last five years, the macro economic projections from
the IMF have turned out to be too ambitious. Announcements of programmes launched and
agreements signed offered as signs of successes are in fact a confusion between targets and
instruments. There were very few attempts at managing people’s expectation. At the same
time the real progress and transformation taking place in agriculture, education, health and
financial management, were not proceeding fast enough to make a visible difference to the
lives of the urban population.

The reality was that the huge capacity shortcomings in the public service; the culture of
corruption that had prevailed long before the war; the dilapidated nature of the economy and
its almost complete destruction during the war, all combined to render the task of meeting the
people’s expectations and therefore of sustaining the election’s trust and euphoria impossible.
As is usually the case, during and immediately after the conflict, several NGOs and even
bilateral organizations flood the country with generous humanitarian support. When the time
period for such supplies endures, an inevitable culture of dependency develops. Sierra Leone
has been no different. The humanitarian agencies, complemented by the largest UN force at
the time, created a superficial social and economic system where goods and services were
provided free and relatively efficiently. However this situation was unsustainable. Once the
support dried up, and the NGOs left, the new government was expected to step in. The latter
neither had the resources nor the organizational capacity to do so. Worse the public service
system, and officials in place still exhibited the characteristics of the pre-conflict culture; rent-
seeking behavior, operating cozily in a system of weak enforcement of law and order. This
was particularly evident in the urban areas where unemployment reached astronomical
proportions, augmented by the newly migrated population from the rural areas.

By 2005, criticisms of the political leadership were becoming open, particularly in the urban
areas. As elections approached in 2007, the position of the ruling party came increasingly
under threat, and popular songs were getting more and more anti-government. The oncoming
elections and the real likelihood of losing, spurred the political leadership to accelerate action
and to take on and explain some of the difficult decisions confronted. By the end of the 2006,
sanitation in the capital had been improved; the level of transfers to District Councils had
increased, measures were put in place for water supply and energy to be provided to the large
towns in the provinces etc. The forthcoming elections will confirm whether the trust of the
people in the political leadership is still maintained. What is clear beyond question is that
unless radical measures are deployed to deal with the civil service, the reform agenda of the
political leadership will not progress – at least not at the speed expected.

There is one area where the political leadership failed, and to its own detriment. This was in
the area of information and communication. Failure to maintain a constant and structured
dialogue with the population provided space for opposition and other groups to imaginatively
create the worst possible scenarios for every issue. The political leadership was too often on
the defence because the media and the opposition frequently had brought issues to the
attention of the public. The poor standard of journalism explains the many wild and
unsubstantiated rumours – usually sensational but incorrect. In this communications age,
where information can be diffused globally within seconds, it is important for any leadership to
send out regularly the information on its activities. Delays in doing so often result in distorted,
usually incorrect, information having already poisoned the minds of the population, before the
truth is revealed. Detractors of the political leadership search for every opportunity to discredit the government.
Failure to give priority to a well crafted communication and information strategy in Sierra Leone partly contributed to the population not fully appreciating the results achieved by the leadership.

It is not very easy to gauge whether political leadership has maintained the trust of the population in post-conflict Sierra Leone, because of the level of access by the majority to mass media, the absence of a credible polling of the electorate etc. The true test should occur at the elections, assuming this to be free and fair. Nevertheless proxy indicators can be used to assess the extent of continuation of the trust that was manifested in the landslide victory of the last presidential elections. The first is the extent to which the promises made at elections were achieved or perceived to be achieved. On the political front, decentralization has brought government closer to the grass roots and potentially empowered local leaders; there is a high level of political tolerance and freedom of speech and association; state authority has been restored throughout the country; the social sector has witnessed significant improvements in schools built, clinics and hospitals rehabilitated etc. On financial management, the systems are now in place for dramatic changes. The macro economy has been stable and registered respectable levels of growth rates etc. The slow headway in dealing with infrastructure rehabilitation, the persistence of poor performance in some public sector enterprises that provide public services such as water supply and electricity, the perception of the continuation of impunity, and the rumours of corruption among senior officials, may be seen as unfulfilled promises, and may lead to erosion in the trust of the population.

The future of political leadership
It is evident that weaknesses in the public sector reinforced capacity weaknesses in the political leadership; ranging from managerial, to policy and strategy. The deficits observed in leadership relate to managerial skills, institutional arrangements, and other practices that could easily become the accepted practice if left to persist eg, corruption, impunity and lack of accountability. No doubt the conflict had exacerbated the shortages of skilled public sector officials, and perhaps the emergence of new political leaders, but on the other hand it provided the possibility of a clean slate to start afresh. New activists could have and did try to set up new political parties. The problem is that launching a political party is quite an expensive affair. And in a country with a GDP that is below $1.5 billion, there is not a lot of resources that can be mobilised easily. Budding politicians have to secure a place for themselves in one or the other main political parties, in order to have a voice in policy formulation. To the extent that political leadership refers to those leading political movements, only the well entrenched traditional parties have the machinery to mobilise the support needed to be considered seriously. New third parties have not done very well in the entire history of the country. To be realistic then, the chances for effecting change is greater if it emerges from within the existing parties, than through a new party. The lesson here is that the best choice is to approach change from within. Identify change agents in the leadership and complement them with change agents from abroad.

Conclusions A number of challenges face the political leadership in post conflict Sierra

10 Although proxy indicators do not provide unequivocal evidence, nevertheless they can suggest trends. In this respect elections will be a useful proxy. Admittedly voting will be a function of not only past achievements but on the perception of what lies in the future, the alternatives available, the traditional patterns of voting etc.
Leone. The most important is arguably the delivery of services expected by the population. Capacity issues ranging from managerial to institutional as well as the historical evolution of leadership in the country, affect the degree of the leadership’s success in this domain. In turn this influences largely the extent to which the trust already conferred by the population on the current leadership is maintained. Maintaining that trust is vital, if the country is to avoid a relapse to violence. The forthcoming elections in a few weeks will provide a pointer to the pulse of the population.

Sierra Leone’s experience over the last five years does offer some lessons. The new leadership will have to study these carefully in order to build on the successes, and devise solutions to deal with the setbacks. Unfortunately the new regime will not have the time or the luxury of a honeymoon period because once the memories of the conflict wear off, and it seems to be; there will be more agitation for development results. At the same time the goodwill and interest of the international community will also decline. The choice therefore should be for results that will make a visible difference in the lives of the people, and quickly.

Priority must go to implementation capacity since the basics have been set; policies adopted, plans formulated, and programmes launched. To do so, the leadership will have to contend with the challenges related to the installation of modern systems of management and controls, the reduction in the influence of informal networks, and the introduction of skilled and experienced personnel in strategic positions. This means tackling Civil Service Reform urgently. The task is rendered even more difficult in the absence of external resources. Donors should not let slow implementation generate despair among them at this point; rather this is the critical time for greater engagement.

On the side of the new leadership, it should be capable of, and be prepared to take quick and firm corrective measures. Time is of the essence. The hordes of young people hanging around idle in the capital and other towns need to be given hope. Failure to do so will lead the country to the irreversible slide to anarchy as crime, indiscipline, and disenchantment will become the order of the day. Looking for a solution at that point will cost far more, and last much longer than the last conflict.

This Paper must end with the expression of hope. The foundations have almost been completed, in the form of laws passed, institutions set up, and good governance started. What is now required is the construction of the edifice above the foundation – the part that will be seen by all, the section that will show visible benefits to the population. The composition of the team constituting the new political leadership will indicate whether this can become a reality.