

Sierra Leone

Country Risk Assessment Brief



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1. Executive Summary/Likely Scenario

Since 2002 Sierra Leone has been slowly emerging from the devastation caused by its civil war. However, the country ranks near the bottom of most global indices. According to available data, it appears that the current status quo will continue in the short-term. Moderate gains have been made in terms of government reforms. However, attempts to implement these reforms in all sectors of society will likely be slowed by endemic corruption. Even with the ongoing support of foreign governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations, it will be several years until the government is able to build a semblance of capacity and provide its citizens with the most basic services. Human development levels will likely remain very low, without great likelihood of worsening in the near future. On a positive note, Sierra Leone's economy will likely recover to pre-economic crisis levels over the next several years.

The ongoing presence of international crime networks and emerging presence of terrorist groups will likely adversely affect the country's security and political stability. Regional volatility, especially in Guinea, threatens to spill-over into neighbouring countries, including Sierra Leone and Liberia, which have a history of intertwined civil wars. The presence of certain natural resources (diamonds) and discovery of new ones (oil) may contribute to economic development in the future. However, if the mismanagement of natural resources continues, the country could enter a new stage of conflict. *In sum, the likely trigger for the above scenario may be a failure of the nascent government institutions, which can materialize in a form of a corruption scandal, or popular uprising. The prevalence of discontented and unemployed youth, most of which has borne arms in the civil war, provides an element of uncertainty as the group can be manipulated by political actors.*

2. Sierra Leone in Context

Sierra Leone is a Western African country, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, between Guinea and Liberia. Its territory and population are small: 71,740 sq km (118th in size) and 5,132,138 people. It is a constitutional democracy and a former British colony, which gained independence in 1961. The official language is English and it is spoken at schools, government institutions and the media. Krio language, however, remains the most widely spoken language in all parts of the country. While distinct ethnic groups exist, ethnicity was never at the forefront of conflict and Krio language is spoken by all ethnic groups, thus facilitating ethnic interactions.

Since independence, the country was ravaged by conflict largely driven by corruption and mismanagement of natural resources after the exit of the British. The government has experienced several military coups, but a full-fledged civil war did not erupt until 1991 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels attacked Sierra Leone from the neighbouring Liberia. Backed by Liberia's warlord and ex-president, Charles Taylor, the RUF led a campaign of terror under populist slogans. The government was too weak to protect its citizens and unable to pay the salary to its military. It subsequently suffered a coup in the middle of the civil war and various self-help factions developed within the population in order to defend villages from the rebel attacks. On the brink of defeat, the RUF acquiesced in peace negotiations that led to Abidjan Agreement in 1996 – only to collapse a year later. The Conakry Accords in 1998 were similarly ineffective. Finally, the Lome Peace Accord was signed in 1999, which also provided for the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

Despite the Lome Accords, UN peacekeepers were taken hostage in 2000. Subsequently, the government of Sierra Leone asked the UN to establish a special court to bring RUF leaders to justice. An agreement on the special court was signed between the UN and Sierra Leone in 2002. The war has since stopped, but riots occasionally continue. The country is currently relatively stable, but its location in a volatile region, its poverty, dependence on international aid and weak institutional capacity continuously place it at risk of new conflict.

3. Worst Case Scenario/ Close to Likely Scenario (refer above)

The peace established following the end of the civil war will rapidly disintegrate. The influx of international support and financing will not significantly reduce ongoing insecurity, or adequately bolster government legitimacy. Donor fatigue may lead to decreased levels of financial aid and international presence. A decline in the nominal gains made in the area of anti-corruption will decrease levels of foreign investment, erode the government's capacity to maintain order and stability, and divide the central and regional state authorities. Moreover, vast levels of unemployment coupled with a young population will foster widespread civil upheaval and/or the resurgence of a violent government opposition. Continued illicit drug trafficking and illegal trade in diamonds will expand and draw in Sierra Leone's youth, reversing any gains made in establishing political and social stability. Given this context, Sierra Leone's economic slump will heighten the potential for destabilization.

Current levels of state volatility may be greatly exacerbated by any exogenous shocks, resulting from regional conflicts or unforeseen natural disasters. In the event of such shocks, there will likely be widespread civil disorder and the government will not be able to recover control over the populace, without timely external support. In sum, Sierra Leone will move from fragile to failed state status. *In sum, likely triggers of conflict are: sudden withdrawal of international support, sharp increase in uncontrolled crime and terrorist networks, and regional instability.*

4. Best Case Scenario/ Least likely

The upward trends in democratic and political stability will continue, leading to the passage and successful implementation of reforms and legislation that aim to fight corruption, promote decentralization, stem environmental degradation, and tackle human development problems like sexual violence, maternal mortality, and illiteracy. UN and other foreign support for these reforms will continue, as well as aid flows and increased regional political and military integration efforts.

The winding down of the global financial crisis will allow the GDP to recover to previous or improved growth rates and will encourage international investment. This will have a trickle-down effect on other areas of the economy, including employment rates and poverty levels in general. The Kimberly Process and improved governmental monitoring will be successful in curbing the majority of illegal diamond mining schemes.

Truth and reconciliation efforts will continue to improve relations between former combatants, the military, and the citizens of Sierra Leone. Further national and regional stability will be achieved as the military is integrated into UN and regional peace operations. The strengthening of the army along with the continued presence of international anti-narcotics and anti-piracy campaigns will hinder drug and arms trafficking and other criminal activities, which will help keep the nation from spiralling downward into future internal conflict.

No specific triggers identified as we believe that the best case scenario can only materialize through a lengthy process of cooperation between Sierra Leonean government, the regional stakeholders and the international community.

5. Stakeholder Analysis

KEY ACTORS	EFFECTS (positive/negative/mixed)	INTERESTS
Internal Stakeholders		
Sierra Leonean government (APC)	Mixed	To retain power; to bring greater transparency and accountability to continue receiving Western donor support
Opposition party (SLPP)	Mixed	To win power; to appear as a contributor to the building of a well-managed state
External Stakeholders – Regional¹		
Liberia	Mixed	To bring about accountability for war crimes committed during the civil war – Liberia’s TRC is calling for a special court, similar to Sierra Leone’s ²
Guinea	Mixed	Unclear motivations; unstable political situation at the moment ³
Ivory Coast	Mixed	To retain power (government); to have democratic elections (the people) ⁴
ECOWAS ⁵	Positive	To promote economic integration in all fields of economic activity – ECOWAS capacity is currently overstretched due to instability of many West African countries
Mano River Union	Positive	To achieve sub-regional economic integration (initially between Sierra Leone and Liberia – Guinea joined in 1980); to establish a customs union between member states ⁶
African Union	Positive	To promote accelerated socio-economic integration of the continent; to achieve greater unity and solidarity among the African countries and peoples
External Stakeholders – International		
United Nations and UN specialized agencies/ NGO’s	Positive	To bring stability to the region: heavily invested in the region, funding of prior missions to Sierra Leone (UNOMIL and UNAMSIL); to maintain at minimum basic levels of security, governance and human development in Sierra Leone ⁷

United States	Mixed	To bring stability to the region; possible ulterior desire to make Sierra Leone an exemplar of its transitional justice efforts – also heavily invested in the region (expertise AND resources)
United Kingdom (& other European governments)	Mixed	Similarly to the United States, but perhaps without the ulterior motive of showing the superiority of ad hoc tribunals over the International Criminal Court
Multinational Corporations	Mixed	To profit from previous and new resource development in Sierra Leone, especially in the mining and oil sector – but require a more stable environment

 - indicates positive trend

 - indicates status quo

 - indicates negative trend

Governance and Political Stability 	<p>Stabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The level of democracy has improved since 2006 but continued development is inhibited by endemic corruption, poor education, tenuous political stability, and political violence and intimidation.⁸ ▪ Specifically, the past 3-4 years have seen development in areas of accountability, government effectiveness, regulation, rule of law, and control of corruption.⁹ ▪ Post-conflict justice mechanisms currently involve the prosecution of high ranking officials who perpetrated atrocities during the civil war; formal truth-telling activities have also taken place.¹⁰ <p>Destabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Despite the positive trend in government capacity, indicators remain low on global percentile ranking (10-40th percentile).¹¹ ▪ Outbreaks of political violence in 2009 between All People's Congress (APC – in power) and Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP – opposition) threaten the country's political stability.¹² ▪ Corruption continues to limit the political efficacy of Sierra Leone's citizens to restrain the actions of the political elite.¹³ ▪ Limited freedom of the press; high-level corruption remains a taboo topic, unreliable power supplies, poor funding and low advertising revenues impede efforts at democratization.¹⁴ ▪ Judiciary retains some independence but it is generally perceived as weak and corrupt.¹⁵ ▪ Policing and security remain problematic due to insufficient state resources.¹⁶
Militarization 	<p>Stabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government has an army target of 10, 500 personnel by 2007.¹⁷ ▪ The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) plans to create a company for Peace Support Operations in ECOWAS, AU and the UN by 2007, and increase this to battalion size by 2010.¹⁸ <p>Destabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High unemployment rates among male youth, many of which were former combatants or child soldiers during the civil war.¹⁹ ▪ Increase in illegal drug trade linked to increased level in arms trafficking – hindering stabilizing efforts of military and other state institutions.²⁰
Population Heterogeneity 	<p>Stabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Freedom of religion generally respected by the government.²¹ ▪ No current major ethnic or religious violence.²² <p>Destabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No pressing factors at present.
Demographic Stress 	<p>Stabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low number of external refugees.²³ ▪ Low and stable population growth rates projected.²⁴ <p>Destabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 42.9% of the population aged between 0-14 years.²⁵
Human Development 	<p>Destabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low life expectancy (under 50 for both men and women) and continued high poverty rates, with approximately 70% of the population living under the natural poverty line.²⁶ ▪ Very high maternal mortality rates and very high under-five mortality rates (262 per 1,000 live

	<p>births, ranked first in the world).²⁷</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stagnant position on the Human Development Index at 180 out of 182 countries.²⁸ ▪ Little evidence of action being taken to combat female genital mutilation, high maternal and infant mortality rates and sexual violence despite the passing of the <i>Gender Acts</i> in 2007 and the adoption of the Reproductive and Child Health Strategic Plan in February 2009.²⁹ ▪ Low number of women represented politically; female candidates face serious threats and harassment.³⁰ ▪ Low literacy rates among adults, particularly women (estimated at 26.8% in 2007).³¹
<p>International linkages</p> 	<p>Stabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Membership in 48 international organizations. Within Africa, it is a member of the African Union, African Development Bank, African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States, the Economic the Community of West African States and the Mano River Union.³² ▪ U.S. continues to support the work of the TRC (now finished) and the Special Court for Sierra Leone to bring stability and create better accountability.³³ ▪ The country has joined other states in establishing the Kimberley Process in 2003 – a joint initiative among governments, industry and civil society to halt the international trade in blood diamonds.³⁴ ▪ Increase in multipurpose and miscellaneous organization CIFP index since 2000, indicating greater overall integration with the international community (though still low economic organization index signifying weak integration with economic organizations).³⁵ <p>Destabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant decrease in funding for the Special Court for Sierra Leone, especially during the economic crisis.³⁶ Initial fear of risk to Taylor’s trial; the trial continues uninterrupted today. ▪ Kimberly Process has had a limited impact on the illegal trade and sale of blood diamonds; UN expert panel fears Israel’s role as chair of the process will negatively impact illegal diamond trade.³⁷ ▪ Decrease in diamond prices due to economic crisis; investors turned to gold instead – temporary negative effect on diamond-mining sector.³⁸ ▪ Neighbouring Guinea becoming increasingly unstable (news of an alleged pre-planned massacre in the state,³⁹ simmering ethnic tensions,⁴⁰ peacebuilding intervention being contemplated by ECOWAS⁴¹). ▪ Al-Qaeda facilitating the smuggling of cocaine from Colombia to Europe through the poorly policed West African airports.⁴²
<p>Economic Performance</p> 	<p>Stabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ongoing support of several international organizations to initiate and foster sustainable economic development (e.g. UN Development Program, Integrated Peacebuilding Office (UNIPSIL), UN World Food Program, World Bank, IMF, among others).⁴³ ▪ Recent increase in political stability has facilitated a revival of economic activity, especially in the mining sector.⁴⁴ ▪ In late 2009, there was a marked increase in exports of diamonds and agricultural products.⁴⁵ ▪ In May 2009, the country’s government launched <i>Agenda for Change</i> – a poverty reduction strategy focusing on peacebuilding economic development in the areas of agriculture, energy and road infrastructure.⁴⁶ ▪ New oil prospect off the coast of Sierra Leone near the Liberian border.⁴⁷ This can be potentially destabilizing in the long run if not managed properly by the government. <p>Destabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Remains heavily dependent on the support of foreign governments, IOs and NGOs.⁴⁸ ▪ GDP growth, which had been gradually increasing since the end of the civil war, has recently seen a decline (due in part to the recent global economic crisis).⁴⁹ ▪ Following three years of stability, the Leone depreciated by 20% against the US dollar in the first nine months of 2009⁵⁰ alongside ongoing rising inflation in consumer prices.⁵¹ ▪ Level of investment, both private and public, as a percentage of GDP remains below the Sub Saharan Africa average of 22%; and government investment accounts for only 5% of GDP.⁵² ▪ In 2008, the country experienced critical energy shortfalls, which continue to plague the country.⁵³
<p>Environmental Stress</p>	<p>Stabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In 2008 the government banned the transport and export of logs to stop the overharvesting and illegal

	<p>export of timber.⁵⁴</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One of the wettest locations on the coast of Africa.⁵⁵ <p>Destabilizing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deforestation rates continue to increase since the end of the civil war, displacing some people.⁵⁶ ▪ Continued hardship resulting from depleted natural resources following the civil war, overfishing and soil exhaustion due to rapid expansion of cattle-grazing and slash-and-burn agricultural practices.⁵⁷
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ENDNOTES

¹ The regional actors, mainly most West African states, experience complex political, social and economic problems. It is beyond the scope of this assessment to analyze their respective domestic situations, but it needs to be kept in mind that the region is extremely volatile. For example, the postponement of elections in Ivory Coast has led to major demonstrations. Also, violence in Togo related to upcoming elections has created refugee crisis in neighbouring Ghana and Benin. The potential of spillover effects is high and makes prediction that much more problematic.

² Alphonso Toweh, "Liberia commission wants war crimes court," 11 December 2009, Reuters online: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSGEE5BA2AA>, accessed January 28, 2010.

³ In 2008, junta took over power in a bloodless coup in Guinea. Since then it has reassured Liberia and Sierra Leone of its peaceful motivations. Two aspects of concern: 1) the junta is mostly composed of young middle-ranking officers (this can have direct repercussions for Sierra Leone as a model for its disgruntled and unemployed youth), 2) promised elections for 2010 or possibly earlier.

⁴ Ivory Coast (Guinea's neighbour) has been postponing elections for several years now (four and a half years). Recently, President Gbagbo, has dissolved the government and the electoral commission, causing major demonstrations. Reuters online: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSCOC237140>.

⁵ The economic activities of ECOWAS include: "particularly industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions, social and cultural matters" It is crucial to know that ECOWAS is limited in its capacity in terms of improving the situation in Sierra Leone by two factors: 1) it is primarily concerned with economic matters and as such conflict prevention is not in its traditional purview per se; 2) it is overburdened with assisting other states in the region, which exhibit signs of more imminent conflict.

⁶ Since the end of the civil wars in the region, an attempt to revive the MRU (most talk of it in 2007). Its main goal is to work on economic development while recognizing that border security and youth issues are crucial to the process. A positive initiative: MRU youth parliament, which collaborates with other grassroot organizations in the region.

⁷ In 2008, United Nations has established a new organ called Office for West Africa (UNOWA). It is not certain at this point whether UNOWA has much power.

⁸ Polity IV, "Country Report 2007: Sierra Leone," online: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/SierraLeone2007.pdf>, accessed January 26, 2010 (hereinafter Polity IV).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ The United States Institute of Peace, "Truth Commission: Sierra Leone," online: <http://www.usip.org/resources/truth-commission-sierra-leone>, accessed January 27, 2010.

¹¹ Governance Matters; Accountability (38.5 Percentile), political stability (35.4), government effectiveness (11.4), regulation (20.3), rule of law (14.8), and control of corruption (12.6).

¹² Report of the Secretary-General on the Peacebuilding Fund, General Assembly, 64th session, S/2009/419, online: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/UNDOC/GEN/N09/438/29/PDF/N0943829.pdf?OpenElement>, accessed January 2010.

¹³ Polity IV, *supra* note 2.

¹⁴ BBC, "Country profile: Sierra Leone," 28 January 2010, online: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1061561.stm, accessed January 2010.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Polity IV, *supra* note 2.

¹⁷ Sierra Leone Encyclopedia, "Sierra Leone Snapshots," prepared by the Technical Unit, Office of the Vice President (of Sierra Leone), 2008, online: http://www.daco-sl.org/encyclopedia/8_lib/8_3Agov.htm, accessed January 20, 2010.

¹⁸ Sierra Leone Encyclopedia, "Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF)," online: http://www.daco-sl.org/encyclopedia/1_gov/1_6rslaf.htm, accessed January 28, 2010.

¹⁹ Christo Johnson, "Sierra Leone youth need jobs for peace-World Bank," 27 January 2010, Reuters online: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSLDE60Q22Y>, accessed January 28, 2010.

²⁰ UN News Center, "International Drug Trafficking Poses Biggest Threat to Sierra Leone, UN warns," online: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=29758&Cr=sierra+leone&Cr1>, accessed January 27, 2010.

²¹ Amnesty International, Sierra Leone Report 2009, online: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/sierra-leone/report-2009>, accessed January 20, 2010.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ CIA World Factbook, "Sierra Leone," online: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sl.html>, accessed January 20, 2010.

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