

SPANDA FOUNDATION

**HUMAN RIGHTS
MICROFINANCE
& GOING GREEN
IN SIERRA LEONE**



**OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES
WITHIN AN EVOLVING INTERNATIONAL
POLICY ENVIRONMENT**



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SPANDA

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Human Rights, Microfinance & Going Green in Sierra Leone.
Opportunities and Challenges within an Evolving International Policy Environment
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IMPLEMENTING
OUR SOLAR AFRICA

ACRONYMS



ACHPR	AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS
ADB	AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK
APRM	AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM
AU	AFRICAN UNION
CDM	CLEAN DEVELOPMENT MECHANISM
CER	CERTIFIED EMISSION REDUCTION
CIRI	CINGRANELLI-RICHARDS (HUMAN RIGHTS DATA PROJECT)
CORDAID	DUTCH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION
EbA	EVERYTHING BUT ARMS
ECA	ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA
ECOWAS	ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES
EPA	ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT
EU	EUROPEAN UNION
FAO	FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATION
FLO	FAIRTRADE LABELLING ORGANIZATIONS INTERNATIONAL
FT	FAIR TRADE
GNI	GROSS NATIONAL INCOME
HDI	HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX
IFAD	INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT
IMF	INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND
IOM	INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION
KfW	KREDITANSTALT FÜR WIEDERAUFBAU – GERMAN GOVERNMENT-OWNED DEVELOPMENT BANK
M-CRIL	MICRO-CREDIT RATINGS INTERNATIONAL LTD
NABC	NETHERLANDS AFRICAN BUSINESS COUNCIL
NEPAD	NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT
NGO	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
OAU	ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY
ODA	OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE
OECD	ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT
PRSP	POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PLAN
RNW	RADIO NETHERLANDS WORLDWIDE
SER	SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC COUNCIL OF THE NETHERLANDS
SEZ	SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE (ALSO REFERRED TO AS “ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ZONE”)
SLANGO	SIERRA LEONE ASSOCIATION OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
SLPP	SIERRA LEONE'S PEOPLE'S PARTY
SSA	SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
TBL	TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE
UN	UNITED NATIONS
UNDAF	UNITED NATIONS ASSISTANCE FRAMEWORK
UNCDF	UNITED NATIONS CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT FUND
UNDP	UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
UNIDO	UNITED NATIONS INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION
UNJV	JOINT VISION FOR SIERRA LEONE
WFP	WORLD FOOD PROGRAM
WHO	WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
WTO	WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION





1 ~ THE EVOLUTION OF THE DEVELOPMENT DEBATE



It is not so important to learn how to give more, but to learn how to take less.

WOLFGANG SACHS

LARGELY SINCE THE 1990S AND THE GROWING REALIZATION OF THE NEED FOR DEVELOPMENT TO OCCUR FROM THE “BOTTOM-UP” or “from below”, development discourses have begun to encompass concerns for good governance, participation, culture and identity, sustainable human development, self-determined development, as well as human rights, a cross-cutting policy issue, according to the Paris Declaration of 2005¹. In 2008, the Accra Agenda for Action² noted human rights as a cornerstone of development. The third paragraph of the Agenda points out that gender equality, respecting human rights and environmental sustainability are imperative for development practices that aim to make an “enduring impact” on the lives of the poor³.

The most recent publication of the United Nations (UN), in reference to the UN Development Programme’s (UNDP) human development indicators, the UN *Human Development Report*⁴ of November 2011 encompasses several components of environmental, equity and human development. Currently, Sierra Leone finds itself in the 180th spot, out of a total of 187 countries ranked.

The evolution of development policy, encompassing the above principles and international standards, is one of the largest influences on Sierra Leone’s current policy environment. Good governance, according to the 2009 Joint Vision for Sierra Leone, co-authored by the UN and the government of Sierra Leone (UNJV)⁵, precedes the consolidation of peace. The consolidation of peace is equated with economic development and prosperity.

This UNJV claims that, today, human rights abuses are “more social and economic in nature”⁶. Therefore, in order to promote human rights and promote development, the government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations Family⁷ view partnerships with NGOs as imperative, seeking to support the endeavours of the Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), for example. While looking to the government as the leader, the UN claims that the World Bank will maintain a central role in the Ministry of Finance and other development committee meetings.

The multilateral vision for the country is “agreed to” by eighteen different UN-affiliated international organizations, including, but not limited to, the Food and Agricultural Organization, (FAO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Food Program (WFP). It is also “associated with” the World Bank and the African Development Bank (ADB). They are pooling their efforts in order to tackle issues such as equitable and affordable access to health care, public services, youth integration, as well as human rights protection, gender equality and poverty reduction.

Within this context, (economic) empowerment is a building block of the human rights-based approach to development⁸ and highly significant. Its application could inform the decisions of development aid donors, for example, regarding choices of aid instruments in order to help to strengthen accountability. It is also identified as being central to policy coherence in relation to development and “larger foreign policy objectives” in order to avoid policy contradiction and duplication⁹.

Though international institutions promote democracy in relation to development, sovereignty has increasingly been challenged. It has been undermined in countries that are dependent upon foreign aid and, sometimes, governance expertise provided for by bodies such as the UN or its economic arm of the World Trade Organization (WTO). This problem of undermined sovereignty, however, is underemphasized.

In fact, it has been argued that the Doha Round of negotiations in the WTO have come to a stand-still due to the fact that some states of the Global South have refused to trade-in sovereignty in relation to domestic space for development policy for market access¹⁰. They have begun to reject international encroachments on sovereignty as a “legitimate trade-off for achieving their development goals”¹¹. The reliance on discourses of both human rights and development must be “seriously rethought”¹². In fact, an inverse relationship between concerns for human rights and aid flows has been recognized¹³, whereby “major recipients of aid also commit major violations of human rights”.

1.1 ~ BILATERAL AID OR FREE TRADE ?

As of 2011, a debate has been steadily increasing within the public and international development policy worlds. According to the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER), underdeveloped countries need investment¹⁴.

The current debate, laced with crosscutting and complex policy concerns and implications, is centred on one central question: why, despite vast amounts of development aid, do many countries remain impoverished? Development NGOs, however, fiercely object, claiming that development aid has seen results. Despite this, aid has been slowly decreasing in terms of its presence as a life vest for floundering national budgets in many states, many of them post-conflict environments.

Taking into account the effectiveness that aid can have at the micro-level, as well as its potential as a leverage mechanism for civil society, one of the factors that favours the continuing of ‘rich countries’ supplying aid to Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is the reality of this “aid dependency trap”¹⁵. Cutting off international aid flows right now would, unfortunately, have disastrous consequences. Due to the fact that many low-income countries in SSA, such as Sierra Leone, are “heavily dependent on foreign aid for government investments, for technology and knowledge, for capacity building”¹⁶, outright stopping aid flows would eliminate many of their leading economic sectors, as Official Development Assistance (ODA) to SSA in 2003, for example, contributed to almost twelve percent of the continent’s Gross National Income (GNI)¹⁷.

Aid has been seen as a simplifier of Africa’s problems and it has been argued that unless the rare task of accounting for every dollar of aid money occurs, private money to charities and foreign aid to governments should cease¹⁸. Officials from the Netherlands African Business Council (NABC), may argue that although some NGOs may be inefficient and lack local ownership and involvement, governments often undertake tasks that are impossible to fully accomplish, such as eliminating poverty¹⁹; for these reasons, investment is the way forward in the long run.

Nevertheless, non-profits and NGOs from the development, humanitarian and human rights fields have raised concerns about the ability of trade alone to eradicate poverty due to its imbalanced impact on the poorest of the poor, some governments, council and international institutions and companies from the private and financial sectors are arguing the opposite. Those who discuss aid for trade initiatives talk of productivity. “Negative competitiveness spillovers”, resulting from aid inflows such as Dutch disease²⁰, can be offset by improved productivity.



2 ~ SIERRA LEONE 2011: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

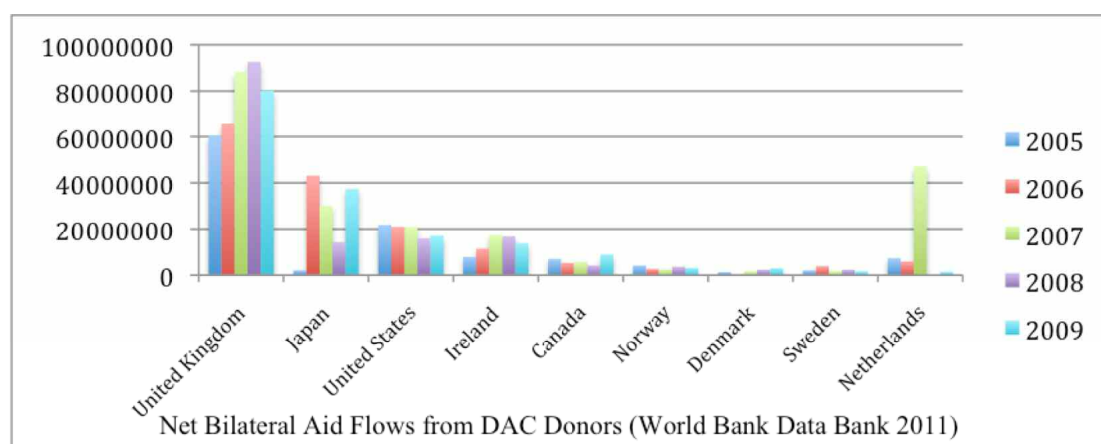


T

2.1 ~ A CRISIS OF OWNERSHIP AND ECONOMY

THE COUNTRY'S FIRST POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PLAN (PRSP) OF 2008, CREATED JOINTLY WITH THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (IMF), POINTS TO A LACK OF NATIONAL PRIORITIES BEING PRESENT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DEVELOPMENT AID. INSTEAD, DONOR PREFERENCES LARGELY DICTATE POLICY PRIORITIES IN THE SMALL WEST AFRICAN NATION. WHILE THE ENERGY SECTOR, ACCORDING TO THE PRSP, DID NOT RECEIVE ADEQUATE FUNDING, THE ACTIVITIES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS DID. WHILE THE REPORT CLAIMS THAT THE PEOPLES' PRIORITIES FALL WITHIN THE REALM OF AGRICULTURE, DUE TO ITS CENTRAL ROLE IN SIERRA LEONE'S ECONOMY, ACCESS TO CREDIT AND THE MARKET ARE IDENTIFIED AS SOME OF THE SECTOR'S MAIN CHALLENGES, AS "EMPLOYMENT IS A KEY FACTOR IN POVERTY REDUCTION"²¹.

Despite the increasing rhetoric of the need to align incoming funds with national priorities, the UN's need for an increase of 60 percent by donor countries to carry out its work in Sierra Leone, in a time of crisis where development aid is being cut by the billions, may fall victim to the mandate's of some of the largest donor countries: the United Kingdom, the USA and the Netherlands. With the fallout of the economic crisis forcing some countries to focus more of their efforts inward (UK, US and Ireland, for example), Japan seemed to be picking up the slack as of 2009. However, with the small nation now pulling itself out of a recent near-nuclear disaster, earthquake and tsunami, it is difficult to imagine that bilateral flows to Sierra Leone will maintain their growth with the country needing to focus on its own humanitarian disasters and development challenges. With almost three-quarters of Sierra Leone's bilateral development aid coming from a small selection of donor countries, countries that are decreasing their bilateral aid efforts through such large donor organizations as United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the German government-owned development bank (KfW), the Dutch international development organization Cordaid and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)²², among hundreds of smaller ones, alternative sources of income must be sought after.



Though the UK, Ireland and some Scandinavian countries are also seeing decreases in their bilateral aid to Sierra Leone, there is one country whose cuts have been the most drastic and, undoubtedly, materially devastating for development and human rights efforts in Sierra Leone: the Netherlands cut 0.1 percent of its GNI that it was allocating to international development cooperation, the equivalent of approximately 1 billion Euros²³. In 2007, bilateral aid flows from the Netherlands to Sierra Leone jumped to over 47 million (current USD); by 2009, however, they were less than 1.5 million²⁴.

2.2 ~ SIERRA LEONE AT THE POLICY CROSSROADS OF AID AND TRADE

Sierra Leone's PRSP for the period 2008-2012 clearly states its stance in relation to the aid for trade debate, indirectly addressing the current challenges of funding and priorities. It claims:

“no economy has reduced poverty for any length of time without sustained growth. Economic growth is the single most powerful way of pulling people out of poverty. It creates the resources to fund social goods such as health and education, but more importantly and more directly, it creates demand for labour, the main – often the sole – asset of the poor”²⁵.

Growth, according to this view, creates jobs. Sierra Leone’s inability, until now, to experience the theoretical causal relationship between investment and growth is illustrated with the fact that one-quarter of young men in the country remain unemployed²⁶.

Sierra Leone’s current strategy to reduce poverty-related expenditure, totaling 87.9 percent of total development expenditure²⁷, emphasizes the nation’s need to promote the diversification and increase of private sector investment. Though it is slowly increasing, the investments are primarily concentrated in a few sectors, such as minerals. Promoting “productive sectors” and increasing financial returns remain at the centre of Sierra Leone’s current bilateral relationships and policy initiatives.

According to the IMF report on the country’s state of affairs in relation to this priority, “within the framework of the national poverty reduction strategies, key reforms and programmes have been sought to place the private sector in the driver’s seat for promoting economic growth and enhancing job creation”²⁸. Sierra Leone welcomes higher investments by both public and private entities in the energy sector. Focusing on the energy sector is “an important catalyst for achieving high economic growth and hence poverty reduction”²⁹. The energy policy *Sierra Leone Electricity and Water Regulatory Commission Act 2011*³⁰ has been adopted by the national Cabinet and was awaiting approval in parliament. This was due to the absence of the representatives from the Sierra Leone’s People’s Party (SLPP), the main parliamentary opposition, who were boycotting against a police ban on their activities³¹.

The current national policy environment has the intention to increase both social and economic opportunities. Sierra Leone’s joint development strategy with the UN seeks to increase the access to markets, as well as social services, for populations in rural regions, better manage its natural, marine and mineral resources, protect human rights and ensure gender equality. In order to take steps towards fulfilling these broad policy goals, especially in rural areas, the construction of community growth centres is considered imperative.

Having the ability to utilize communication and internet services in order to access relevant information, whether work, culture or education related, would help to foster the simultaneous goal within the joint vision of supporting micro, small and medium enterprise development. Improvements in the national health system have also been placed in the list of priorities in Sierra Leone; skills upgrading and facilities that are better equipped to deal with emergency response are considered crucial.

2.3 ~ THE STATE OF SIERRA LEONE’S INTERNATIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS

Sierra Leone is a member state of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Consisting of four main institutions, including a Commission, the Parliament, the Court of justice and bank for investment and development, the mandate of ECOWAS is to promote economic integration in fields of activity, including energy, agriculture, transport, monetary, financial, social and cultural matters, among others. Its specialized agencies include those dealing with gender issues, health and water resources, for example.

Currently, Sierra Leone is involved in trade negotiations with the EU through its participation in the ECOWAS Commission. The European Union (EU) and the West African community of nations are in negotiations to sign an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). This type of agreement, according to the European Commission for Trade, benefits everyone through increased employment and income generation, lower prices, increased access to markets and services and issues relating to development because it believes that “trade is development”³². Sierra Leone, however, has already signed with the EU the “Everything but Arms” (EbA) arrangement, so it already has preferential access to the EU market for its main agricultural export products. Signing the EbA, according to the Delegation of the European Union to Sierra Leone, will provide Sierra Leone with a further competitive advantage for its exports against other emerging economies³³.

Increased trade and access to markets facilitated through agreements such as those made by regional institutions like ECOWAS and the EU can indeed produce benefits for poverty reduction, increasing the demand and facilitating trade for commodities such as oil, gas and cocoa. It is blatantly obvious that, despite efforts at trade diversification in recent years following criticisms regarding developing countries dependence and sensitivity to global commodity price fluctuations and cycles, in 2008, West Africa still predominantly exports raw materials and imports products of higher technological, intellectual and added-value. Furthermore, Geske Dijkstra, Dutch development economist and scholar, believes that increasing trade on its own is insufficient for addressing all human rights concerns. “Human rights is more than wealth, so trade (or efforts in poverty reduction) cannot improve human rights fully”³⁴.

2.4 ~ THE FAIRNESS OF FAIR TRADE : PROSPECTS FOR SIERRA LEONE

The Fair Trade (FT) concept's origins are constructed in the latter part of the nineteenth century, with the development of cooperative organizations³⁵. By 1997, 150 years later, the existence of a Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO) marked the beginning of a single fair trade market, on a global scale³⁶. Fair Trade, as we know it today, a true social, economic, political and historical phenomenon, has existed for less than two decades. It is, it seems, just getting started, increasing in importance and relevance for the construction of a more just global production-trade-consumption system.

Fair Trade agreements, under the standards set by international authorities such as the FLO, have had diverse impacts on the lives of those involved in the growing industry. Producers are required to, for example, be free to democratically organize themselves, taking the form of associations. The fair trade brand comes at a price; producer associations must participate in yearly impact reports and environmental assessments.

In the FT system, producers are guaranteed a minimum above the world price, including social and environmental premiums for reinvestment. With agreements including stipulated bonuses for organics, the growth in the FT movement can also explain an increasing popular and growing market for organic products as well, being met with an increasing supply. These markets are dominated by several commodities, which include, but are not limited to, coffee, cacao, bananas, tea and soy.

Both movements openly challenge the ecologically and socially destructive relations involved in conventional consumption and production patterns³⁷. Utilizing commodity certification, FT involves fewer "major production interests" and is buttressed by "strong transnational NGOs"³⁸. Given that, according to international FT standards, producers should receive a price that covers the cost of sustainable production for their products. Seeking to increase producer control over their own futures, work conditions and quality of life³⁹, fair trade initiatives provide social premiums to fund local development projects, thus supporting related non-profits, and financing for small producers⁴⁰.

In Sierra Leone, it has been observed that, "that the poorer the producers, the more the project's impact manifested itself in terms of poverty alleviation and food security"⁴¹. Income increases have resulted from increases in production volume or the price being paid to the producers. Employment increases have resulted from the creation of jobs within the creation of certified products and their supply chain.

When 12.5 tonnes of certified Fair Trade cocoa was first shipped to Europe for *Divine Chocolate*, 300 farmers were paid an above market price for their cocoa beans, a portion of which was put back into as an investment into the producer cooperative⁴². From September 2008 to August 2010, Biolands International Ltd, an agribusiness working in the exportation of certified organic cocoa, received a grant from the Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund to undertake a project in Sierra Leone regarding Smallholder Cocoa Improvement. Receiving almost 2.3 million USD, the project has provided over 100 direct rural jobs, working with approximately 20 000 'active' cocoa growers in the Kono District of the country⁴³.

With an established clean diamond initiative in Sierra Leone since the end of the civil war, Fair Trade has also found its way to the mining industry. However, as a brand, FT has is now commonly coined in many ways, especially with, supposedly, conscientious companies. This contradiction can be found in the rhetoric of Fairtrade Mining, for example, which is based in northern Sierra Leone. According to its homepage (2011):

"The actual cost of creating these facilities is relatively low, not just because local labour is cheap but also because the building materials will be produced as part of the mining process [...] this model [...] will form a template for similar sympathetic and symbiotic operations in other Chiefdoms in the region. Whether these areas are mined sequentially or in parallel, as part of a quickly expanding business is not yet known. Fairtrade Mining believes that other Chiefs will actively encourage us to mine their area when they become aware of the benefits we are bringing to Kasasi"⁴⁴.

Despite the ways that the brand or word of FT is put to use, as a practice it has provided important protection for producers through providing a guaranteed price for FT commodities⁴⁵. Nevertheless, the fairness of some Fair Trade has been questioned. In the politics of Fair Trade, while importers, those deciding how much of which products go where. industrialized countries are largely home to labelling organizations, most notably the FLO (a "consortium of FT groups" from Canada, Japan, the US and Europe) that administer and monitor producer groups, based largely in countries of the Global South⁴⁶. This influence is, arguably, the greatest in the countries whose economies depend primarily upon the export of commodities, cash crops and tropical fruits. Discussing the increasing interest in the brand that is FT, today, means asking the question, fair trade for whom, by whom?

A consequence of the hasty integration of so many Southern producers in an era of globalizing processes, "related processes of market liberalization are forcing many producers out of conventional high input agriculture"⁴⁷. The fair trade movement has pushed producers into moving towards commodities that are more popular fair trade items, and those that are more lucrative to harvest. Organic or non-GM soy production, for example, has had serious implications for the Amazon Rainforest due to removing forest in order to make room for commodity crops like the organic, FT soy milk sold to *Starbucks*. With the emergence of any one quickly growing market niche, making room for the cultivation of products to satisfy the demand in the Global North for FT and organic products can also have adverse consequences.

A flaw of the FT concept that has been identified is that “consumers cannot assess whether the fair conditions claimed by the importers or the final marketers are respected”⁴⁸. After appearance or branding, often FT products are “not easily distinguishable from their competitors”⁴⁹. Considering these factors and that there is an obvious geo-political division, still reflecting the exploitative and unequal agri-business relations of the past, it is not difficult to see who the biggest winners remain in the business of Fair Trade.

According to the Fair Trade Foundation (2009), some of their recent work has included helping farmers in Sierra Leone to set up their own FT supply chain. Sierra Leone has also become one of the exporters of FT cocoa being supplied to Divine Chocolate, “the only FT chocolate company co-owned by cocoa farmers”⁵⁰. Co-ownership has meant that 45 percent of profits go to the farmers themselves. This figure alone represents a substantial improvement upon the extent of ownership, within the agricultural production cycle, of farmers and producers in non-fair trade supply chains.

Only 58 percent of all FT supporters do not actually buy FT products⁵¹, whether for price or lack of knowledge or interest. Consumers face a daily trade off between spending a little bit more to make small choices that are (morally, culturally, socially, economically and ethically) more responsible and an unfavourable economic environment. Nevertheless, there is potential in Sierra Leone’s current policy environment that favours the growth of the FT market and opportunities for related initiatives, whether organic or “green”, an area that the Special Economic Zone (SEZ), also referred to as an “Economic Opportunity Zone” for its investor friendly policy climate, First Step, will undoubtedly address in its current project outside of Freetown.

2.5 - FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT MEETS HUMAN RIGHTS

Sierra Leone’s largest “Economic Opportunity Zone” is in the making⁵². It is a subsidiary of World Hope International, a US-based “Christian relief and development agency”⁵³. According to its website, the First Step SEZ in Sierra Leone is strategically located in the country’s principal seaport and is

“building scalable factory facilities, which will have access to guaranteed electric power, water, and other utilities and infrastructure; leasing space in the zone to businesses that wish to export from Sierra Leone; assisting these business tenants with other forms of logistics support to make their establishment and operations as simple and inexpensive as possible; and is providing an array of special incentives for businesses that locate in the First Step SEZ”.

These trade friendly incentives include exemptions from import and export duties, a three-year “corporate tax holiday” and expedited (and preferential) government services. They also provide “widely available” international arbitration and dispute mechanisms and forums, which enable the zone’s “tenants” to “profitably engage Sierra Leone’s labour cost advantages and/or to process its natural resources and, in so doing, create jobs and income in Sierra Leone”⁵⁴.

Seeking to address the policy of the triple bottom line (TBL), the zone will seek to ensure that people holding those jobs will experience a safe and respectful work environment and it will be eco-friendly. Addressing these concerns will facilitate increased participation by businesses and entrepreneurs that are “motivated by ethical concerns”; the TBL policy discourse held by the creators of First Step will facilitate its access to the country’s abundance of natural resources and its “competitive” labour force.

Nevertheless, it is important to weigh the impacts of the SEZ on both human rights and poverty reduction. Only time will tell whether or not First Step succeeds in putting into practice its development rhetoric of social and environmental responsibility. This will depend upon how they succeed in guaranteeing workers’ rights and eco-friendly production⁵⁵, especially taking into account that one of the largest target tenants of the zone are natural resource intense industries, based upon “competitive” (i.e. profitable) labour forces.

Within this context, it has been argued, therefore, “people who used to be involved in human rights have to start thinking about trade”⁵⁶. This push for productivity and shifting from aid to trade is significant for the continued peace within the post-conflict nation. In Sierra Leone, this ‘change in mindset’ is in full swing. This approach sees trade and investment as increasingly powerful tools for human rights protection in relation to development aid or assistance, which is insufficient in eradicating poverty and its subsequent human rights implications; therefore, wealth creation should be made a priority instead.

“If alienation from government and the inability of successive regimes to provide services and economic opportunities for the population were the background to the Sierra Leonean conflict, these deprivations affected all parts of society, if not equally at least severely”⁵⁷. According to this perspective, therefore, it would not be unreasonable to argue that if the roots of the conflict lay within the realm of insufficient economic opportunities, then development that provides these opportunities is necessary in order to avoid falling back into a climate of conflict in which gross human rights violations were commonplace and unavoidable by many factions of Sierra Leone’s society.

In a publication from 2009, maternal mortality and morbidity was recognized by Amnesty International as a threat to human rights in Sierra Leone. It recommended that maternal healthcare services, therefore, be made a priority through addressing shortages of blood, skilled personnel, supplies, facilities, infrastructure, distribution systems, as well

as women's rights⁵⁸. In 2010, the Sierra Leone government launched a free health care policy for pregnant and lactating women. Though steps in the right direction are being made in the country, by 2011, Amnesty International still recognizes that the international and regional human rights obligations of the right to life, health, maternal, sexual and reproductive health are being seriously challenged, despite the steady decline of infant and child mortality in Sierra Leone since 2000⁵⁹. One of the main factors challenging it is a continued lack of resources to fully implement the policies.

Further violations related to poverty-related socio-economic rights, women, children, as well as “the looming threat of ethnic violence” are just a few of the concerns that the human rights advocacy stakeholder has identified in its recommendations to the UN's *Universal Periodic Review*⁶⁰. The path chosen to move forward, as Sierra Leone finds itself at a policy crossroads between seeking increased aid or trade and the practical and ethical implementation of these crucial decisions, will, without a doubt, either positively influence its ability to follow through on its human rights obligations or lead to more of the same violations mentioned above.







C

3.1 - A CASE OF DEMAND AND SUPPLY

COMPASSION FATIGUE TOWARDS THE UNENDING PLIGHT OF MANY OF AFRICA'S INHABITANTS LIVING IN CONDITIONS OF MATERIAL poverty, perpetuated by mass media, often portrays a culture and status quo that is not necessarily the most appropriate or representative of all factions of Africa's residents.

"Compassion is a limited resource, a system rooted in cognitive networks that tire and need refueling. And it's not always rational [...] This fatigue towards long-standing conflicts, human rights abuses, environmental destruction or extreme poverty or famine results from the fact that "the problems sap the imagination in part simply because they are daunting and have not responded well to previous efforts. We have already pumped billions into each, with little visible effect"⁶¹.

For this reason, much of the public in, and governments of donor countries have become increasingly hesitant to provide development aid with "no added value" for their investments. While the side of the debate centred on value-added wealth creation has well-established economic explanations for the importance of trade for poverty reduction, this argument has been criticized due to the fact that trade and investment is often not meant for the poorest of the poor.

The chairman of Micro-Credit Ratings International Ltd (M-CRIL), argues that microfinance's

"claim that it reaches 'the poorest of the poor', and can on its own eliminate poverty, contributes to what is perhaps the major problem affecting microfinance: gross exaggeration of what it can achieve"⁶².

Microfinance is consequently seen as a means of eradicating poverty that largely ignores this same sector of the population. Increasingly an industry that is seen as a subsector of the financial sector, rather than the development sector, its growth has meant an increased focus on financially sustainable and more profitable or "safer" microfinance clients.

Nevertheless, there are stories on a global level of those individuals who have made great gains from their involvement in microfinance programs and the access to micro-loans provided to them. Furthermore, many larger NGOs, specifically ones working in the area of human rights advocacy and protection, have increased their participation in microfinance initiatives. Out of almost NGOs registered within the UN's directory, largely focussed on a range of issues related to human rights, approximately one-quarter claim to work in the area of microfinance⁶³.

They are matching an increasing demand with a supply, increasingly supported by favourable policy priorities. From approximately 2.8 million rural households surveyed in Sierra Leone, 45 percent of them regularly seek access to loans, as well as approximately half of a million urban households⁶⁴. The country's Financial Strategy Development Plan's third point –Access to Finance– and its eight summary –Microfinance and Rural Credit Delivery, Governance and Supervision– seek to facilitate the creation of mechanisms and institutions to supply this increasing demand for microfinance and credit for developmental and productive purposes.

While the positive impacts of microfinance on human rights have been documented, most prominently in the areas of poverty reduction, gender and health⁶⁵, NGOs working in the areas of human rights, but also increasingly in microfinance activities, find themselves in the crux of the debate. The new policies bound to emerge from this debate will undoubtedly alter the way that NGOs carry out their daily activities and undertake their missions. This increasing priority of "wealth creation" may have far-reaching consequences both for NGOs working in human rights, as well as microfinance sectors. It will be necessary, in the coming years of microfinance and development policy evolution, to take into account and try to understand the diverse impacts and characteristics of this new policy environment in Sierra Leone, which seeks to facilitate such projects as the First Step investment opportunity zone and increase investments for value added, productive micro-credit and employment creation initiatives.

3.2 - HUMAN RIGHTS MEET MICROFINANCE

Trade liberalization, de-regulation and the promotion of favourable investment climates through evolving national policies have sought to reduce poverty through increasing employment opportunities and, thus, wealth creation. Microfinance has sought to do the same; however, its target group differs from that of the companies looking to invest in SEZs⁶⁶.

Though many perspectives on the issue exist, microfinance has been identified to increase social capital and women's empowerment in some contexts. Empowerment may involve raising awareness about human rights issues and

forms of abuse. This is especially relevant for the case of human rights implementation in Africa, where it is reported by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) that women still face unequal access to social opportunities, such as education and health care, and economic opportunities, such as employment and productive resources⁶⁷. The government of Sierra Leone, along with several UN institutions, has introduced several policy measures that seek to promote the rights of women. In 2009, the implementation of the Resolutions 1325 and 1820 of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which seek the engagement of women in peace-building and recognize sexual violence as a tactic of war⁶⁸, as well as the National Gender Strategic Plan were considered priorities.

Nevertheless Amnesty International, in the *Universal Periodic Review* of human rights, argues that there is a continued need to investigate incidents of political and sexual violence in the country. Furthermore, according to the Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Data Project, human rights indicators, women's economic rights have been weakened since the onslaught of the economic crisis⁶⁹.

Mainstreaming human rights concerns into development rhetoric is increasingly being endorsed by regional initiatives in Africa. Currently, there are several mechanisms and institutions that have sought to address human rights obligations within policy. The Framework Document (2005) of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) refers several times to human rights not only as an objective, but a foundation and responsibility of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)⁷⁰, whose aim is to promote and reinforce high standards of governance in the region⁷¹. Furthermore, based in Gambia, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), which came into force in 1986, works to protect and enhance these within the states of the African Union (AU) – formerly the Organization of African Unity (OAU).





IT WAS NOT UNTIL 2008 THAT THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED THE LINK BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE implications and human rights⁷². According to the Council, climate change is considered an immediate and far-reaching threat to communities all over the world; its impacts felt more among those living in the poorest areas. Climate change data, examined through a human rights lens, reflects concerns for the right to safe and adequate water and food, health, housing, land, livelihood, employment and development. Representatives that participated in the Interactive Panel on Human Rights and Climate Change of the UN, in 2009, also view the effective protection of human rights important for reducing the vulnerabilities experienced in the face of climate change threats.

Microfinancing programs, through providing such financial services as microcredits for small business and entrepreneurs, may “benefit individuals and to the extent they do, they may contribute to poverty reduction”⁷³. The effectiveness of Sierra Leone’s increasing focus on private sector, more particularly on energy sector, investment as well as trade, will have direct impacts on the evolution of the microfinance and green growth in the country.

The concept of ‘green’ microfinance is situated within a larger discussion of low-carbon development initiatives. These initiatives include hydro, solar, wind and bio-fuel projects, among others. An increase in the global use of solar cells has been occurring over the previous decade. Solar radiation, unlike thermal and hydro-related renewable energy projects, has yet to find a central place in Sierra Leone’s national policy framework. Its potential, despite this, has been recognized; the use of solar photovoltaic solutions holds much potential for poverty reduction in the country.

By January 2011, there were approximately 2700 validated projects such as these being undertaken in 70 countries. Established under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), the international framework to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, they can include rural electrification initiatives or the installation of more energy-efficient boilers. Part of the Kyoto Protocol⁷⁴ (Article 12), the CDM facilitates the implementation of emission-reduction projects in developing countries by states that have agreed to reduce their emissions or have agreed to an emission-limitation commitment. The financing of these projects earns donor states “saleable certified emission reduction credits” (CER), which are equal to one tonne of CO₂, and are included in the Protocol’s targets⁷⁵. With obvious policy benefits for industrialized countries of the Global North, investing in projects in the form of investment and trade or financing is becoming increasingly popular among donor countries.

In 2010, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published the first empirical assessment of the linkages between microfinance and climate change adaptation. Within this report, three kinds of activities were identified that could be done differently in order to facilitate adaptation. These include technical design changes to current projects, modification of financing modalities, as well as the inclusion of activities outside the realm of current portfolios, such as educational loans and training programmes⁷⁶. The report reaffirms the need to increase the attention paid to microfinance in a climate change context, identifying that, until now, most projects have sought to mitigate greenhouse gases by providing financing to low-income households to access sources of clean or renewable energy⁷⁷.

Projects such as these, however, have been “noticeably absent in the ever expanding set of mechanisms considered relevant for adaptation financing and implementation”⁷⁸. Furthermore, the diversification of livelihood and income generation has the ability to reduce climate vulnerabilities, vulnerabilities that negatively affect the exercise of a wide range of human rights.

The OECD argues that investment must be “harnessed” for green growth. Seeing international investment as a “vital source of finance [...] as countries address the effects of climate change”. Therefore, governments should facilitate the measurement of FDI in support of green growth. In Sierra Leone, during the period from 2003, and peaking in 2007, trade to the country increased⁷⁹. This can be attributed to such factors as increased security and peace in the country, the increase in central government planning taking shape in such policies as the Financial Sector Development Plan, which is pushing for private sector investment and trade, and the promotion at the international level of the advantages and incentives of doing business in Sierra Leone. Through a focus on driving private sector development for employment creation purposes in Sub-Saharan Africa and Sierra Leone in particular, poverty will be decreased, according to the country’s PRSP.

Furthermore, the PRSP argues that clean energy policy and rural electrification are both necessary. While hydro and thermal may be the focus of government power generation, solar energy projects should not be brushed aside. Especially considering that only 70, from a total of 3444 current and future projects, of the CDM are located in Africa.

In other words, only 0.02 of alternative energy projects and green growth projects are being implemented on the African continent, at least the ones that governments are trying to earn credits for through the Kyoto Protocol and CDM. Instead, Sierra Leone's Investment and Export Promotion Agency promotes investment through incentives that include a 100 percent deduction for prospecting and exploration within the mining sector and a deduction of nearly half of the first year's production costs⁸⁰. With a New Mines and Minerals Act in place to guide Sierra Leone's governmental activities in this sector, according to the 2011 progress report, as well as investor-friendly legal and fiscal frameworks, the West African nations is developing "a framework to ensure more private sector participation", a recommendation of the IMF (2011).

Furthermore, to "encourage investment" in both the rice and timber sectors, "qualified investors" have been endowed with a 10-year tax holiday. Though investments in renewable energy and "green growth" initiatives still remain underexplored in Africa, policies with the potential to further promote irresponsible natural resource extraction and exploitation, both of nature and of people, does not fall outside the realm of possibility in Sierra Leone's current policy environment, within larger bilateral, multilateral and transnational forces.

4.1 ~ PROSPECTS FOR A "NEW INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION"

The year 2012 has been christened by the UN General Assembly as the "International Year of Sustainable Energy for All". During the opening of the 14th session of the UNIDO General Conference, taking place in Vienna, its Director-General stated that "one thing is clear: green industry is real. It is already here"⁸¹. The UNIDO's Green Industry Initiative and the conference's theme that addresses the need to make the "new industrial revolution" more sustainable, was commented on by Sierra Leone's Trade Minister. His narrative, spoken on behalf of the Sierra Leone government, clearly outlines the policy objectives and aspirations of the country in the coming period. Sierra Leone seeks industrialization and "meaningful inclusion, which provide the "greatest opportunity" for creating wealth and jobs, as well as poverty reduction; industrialization has also, however, lead to social disorders, gender inequality and environmental destruction. Despite these obstacles, the minister of Trade of Sierra Leone argued that "promises" of this new revolution "must be seized with great zeal"; Sierra Leone, like many countries of Africa, can no longer afford to remain excluded from international value chains.

The narrative continues by arguing that, as a result, energy must be made more widely available, resources and capacities must be mobilized, the economy must be diversified, while the environment protected. However, achieving these goals is difficult for several reasons: first, a lack of research, studies and data on available opportunities for investments and partnerships in the energy sector in Sierra Leone, in order to "engage" them in the development of projects in relation to its seven major and many more smaller rivers and, second, the challenge of attracting investments in a (post) crisis environment. This is especially relevant, considering that out of the five main objectives of UNIDO's Integrated Programme for supporting industrial development and poverty alleviation, which ran from May 2004 for a period of 48 months, three were "not funded" or "not implemented", while two were only "partially implemented"⁸².

Nearing 2012, Sierra Leone still faces a diverse set of challenges in relation to all of the forces and factors previously outlined, but it also holds much opportunity for positive change. The stability and prospects for the small West African nation have been on a steady rise since the end of its civil war. It remains, however, near the bottom of the latest ranking of global human development and still faces challenges pertaining to its obligations of human rights.

Though the country has seen an improvement in the access provided to water and electricity, reducing domestic work time by about 10 hours per week, it currently has the highest number of deaths due to environmental risks, according to the UNDP (2011), a fact that proves the enormous need for sustainable and clean development initiatives. Though it will face increasing cuts to development spending, it is also proactively seeking new opportunities for trade and investment, including microfinance activities and credit, sought after for trade-related projects⁸³. Only time will tell the path that the national policy of Sierra Leone will take, as it finds itself at a crossroads of protecting human rights, the environment and reducing poverty through wealth creation.

While concluding with prospects for the West African nation, it is important to point out that the human rights, social and environmental records of the industrialized, donor and investor countries themselves are far from an providing a developmental ideal type for those countries with the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) ranking, such as Sierra Leone, to follow. This is especially relevant for those countries that preach but do not necessarily practice universal education and healthcare, for example, or CO₂ emission reduction and spend far more, instead, on defence, security or harmful extractive practices. Changes within the production system and supply chains of all products, whether organic or fair trade, is inherently linked to the individual choices and motives of those countries that consume the most of the earth's resources and create the most waste, in their quests for *sustainable* development, innovation and progress.



NOTES



¹ Organized by the OECD, this high-level international forum for aid effectiveness promotes five “core principles” of ownership, harmonization, alignment, results and mutual accountability.

² With the motive of “strengthening and deepening implementation” of the Paris Declaration, the Accra Agenda for Action, attended by 80 developing countries, proposes improving in ownership, inclusive partnerships, delivering results and capacity development. Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action (2011), http://www.oecd.org/document/18/0,3746,an_2649_3236398_35401554_1_1_1_1,00&&an-USS_01DBC.html.

³ McInerney-Lankford, S (2009) “Human Rights and Development: a Comment on Challenges and Opportunities from a Legal Perspective”, 61.

⁴ The Human Development Report released at the beginning of November 2011 is the most recent publication of the UN with reference to the UN Development Programme’s Human Development Indicators.

⁵ The Joint Vision replaces the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) as the overarching framework for United Nations organizations development interventions in Sierra Leone.

⁶ United Nations Country Team Sierra Leone (2009) *United Nation’s Joint Vision for Sierra Leone*, 4.

⁷ The UN family includes the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, the Secretariat and other fifteen agencies and several programmes and bodies. Structure and Organization (2011), <http://www.un.org/an/aboutun/structure/>.

⁸ Kumar, R. (2005). “Corruption, Human Rights and Development: Sovereignty and State Capacity to Promote Good Governance”, 418.

⁹ McInerney-Lankford (2009).

¹⁰ Gallagher, K. (2008). “Understanding developing countries resistance to the Doha Round”: 1.

¹¹ Kumar, R. (2005).

¹² Rajagopal, B. (2006). “Counter-Hegemonic International Law: Rethinking Human Rights and Development as a Third World Strategy”, 768.

¹³ Sano, H.O. (2000). “Development and Human Rights: The Necessary, but Partial Integration of Human Rights and Development”, 745.

¹⁴ In September 2011, the SER on Radio Netherlands Worldwide (RNW) promoted this view to the Dutch Deputy Development Minister.

¹⁵ Hoebink, P. (2009). “Stagnation in Africa”, 124.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Moss *et al.* (2006). “An aid institutions paradox?”, 5.

¹⁸ Theroux P. (2005) “The Rock Star’s Burden”. The Author argues that in Africa, despite thousands of overseas volunteers, teachers and medical practitioners, the promise of many countries has decreased. Despite the “plenty of educated and capable young adults in Africa”, it has not occurred “to anyone to encourage Africans themselves to volunteer in the same way that foreigners have done for decades”.

¹⁹ RNW (28 September 2011).

²⁰ ODA affects real exchange rates and undermines competitiveness, leading to what is commonly known as “Dutch Disease”, and can also undermine the ability of recipient countries’ governments to budget effectively. It can displace certain “processes of institutional maturation [...] including the capacity of the state to collect revenue” (Moss *et al.*, 2006, 5).

²¹ Government of Sierra Leone (2008), 36.

²² Klinkhamer, M. (2009).

²³ RNW (23 September 2011).

²⁴ World Bank (2011) “Data Bank”.

²⁵ Government of Sierra Leone (2008), *Agenda for Change PRS/PII*, 37.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ International Monetary Fund (2011), 18.

²⁸ IMF (2011), 84.

²⁹ Government of Sierra Leone (2008) *Agenda*, 44.

³⁰ The Bill is “geared towards improving electricity and water regulation through the establishment of a Commission which would regulate the affairs of water and electricity supply in the country” and “would help the country in the area of transparency and accountability in water regulation and electricity and it would involve the total participation of the private sector”. Bah, S. (14 October 2011) http://exclusivepress.net/app/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4966&Itemid=1

³¹ Op cit.

³² EU Commission for Trade (2011). “Economic partnerships” <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/wider-agenda/development/economic-partnerships/>.

³³ Delegation of the European Union to Sierra Leone (2011). “The EU-ECOWAS Economic Partnership Agreement” http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/sierra_leone/eu_sierra_leone/political_relations/eu_ecowas/index_an.htm.

³⁴ Dijkstra, G. (30 Oct). “Interview”.

³⁵ Castaldo, S. (2009). “The Missing Link Between Corporate Social Responsibility and Consumer Trust: The Case of Fair Trade Products”, 4.

- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ Reynolds, L. (2000). "Re-embedded global agriculture: The International Organic and Fair Trade movements", 297.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 299.
- ³⁹ Reynolds, L. (2000), 301.
- ⁴⁰ Castaldo, S. (2009), 5.
- ⁴¹ FAO (2011). "Organic and fair-trade exports from Africa", <http://www.fao.org/organicag/organicexports/oe-results/an/>.
- ⁴² The Cocoa Project (8 October 2010). "Cocoa Offers Hope for Sierra Leone", <http://www.thecocoaproject.org/>.
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- ⁴⁵ Reynolds, L. (2000), 304.
- ⁴⁶ Castaldo, S. (2009), 5.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
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- ⁵¹ Castaldo, S. (2000), 5.
- ⁵² First Step (2011) *Homepage*.
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- ⁵⁸ Amnesty International (2009). *Out of Reach Cost of Maternal Health in Sierra Leone*, 7-8.
- ⁵⁹ World Bank Data Bank (2011).
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- ⁷⁰ McInerney-Lankford, 66.
- ⁷¹ NEPAD (2011).
- ⁷² Human Right Council Resolution 7/23 of March 2008.
- ⁷³ Dijkstra, G. (2011).
- ⁷⁴ It is worth noting that some of the largest development aid donors (such as Canada) have yet to sign on to the Kyoto Protocol and, thus, this CDM initiative.
- ⁷⁵ CDM (2011).
- ⁷⁶ The OECD report promotes the scaling-up of the use of flood, drought and salt resistant crops through loans. However, these types of crops come from genetically-modified organisms, which may produce, instead, adverse impacts on sustainability of life in the long term.
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