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Panel – International Democracy Promotion

Title:

**Democratisation in post-conflict reconstruction:
Who is accountable?
Focus on Sierra Leone.**

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Abstract

This paper invites discussion around the issue of accountability in the democratisation of war-torn societies currently undertaken through post-conflict reconstruction by the international community. In recent years the mandate for peace operations has been promoted from 'ending wars' to 'building states' which involves a broad range of activities around democracy assistance programming. These activities aim to improve the previously powerless condition of local people to hold their government to account and thus help to address the causes of war. Democratisation is therefore brokered into peace accords to establish legitimate government and to consolidate peace through full participation.

The irony of this process is that in some cases, by introducing third party interests through interventionist approaches, donors may be *reducing* the capacity of local people to hold their government to account by relocating, distorting or confusing the usual mechanisms of accountability, in particular that of representation. The relevance of this situation is that large mission budgets are associated with state reconstruction through peace-building mandates and this funding is premised on recipient governments becoming more democratic allowing increased and genuine transparency and accountability to their citizens. The prelude to civil war is often the breakdown of the social contract, the mutually re-enforcing relationship of trust, responsibility and accountability between a state and its citizens, and the effective reconstruction of this relationship is important for consolidating peace. This paper therefore aims to assess the democratic credentials of post-conflict reconstruction in Sierra Leone.

1. Introduction

Interventionist programming in post-conflict reconstruction appears to be relocating the relations of accountability in and around the sovereign state. Large amounts of foreign aid are being channelled into collapsed states and war torn economies through integrated peace-building operations such as UNAMSIL¹. In recent years the mandate for peace operations has been promoted from 'ending wars' to 'building states' (Pouligny, 2006) which means that the new peace-building paradigm is not simply to bring about the cessation of conflict, but also to address the *causes of war* through post-conflict reconstruction. This paradigm has been influenced by the debate about nation state sovereignty during the 1990s which concluded that, in some cases, state sovereignty was now weak and porous not absolute and indivisible, and that external intervention was therefore necessary to return sovereignty and legitimacy to government in the collapsed state (Zartman, 1995b). However, generous budgets for multi-dimensional operations have distorted the location of accountability within sovereign states and consequently the relationship between those states and their citizens and civil society by introducing third party interests. The relevance of this distortion is that a priority in post-conflict reconstruction is to promote and assist democratic governance in an attempt to make government more transparent and accountable to citizens^{2 3}, and donor programming involves a diversity of activities for this purpose including electoral and judicial reform, and support to civil society and the media. Democracy is promoted post-conflict because there is evidence that it is linked, as is development, to peace and prosperity (Ball, 1996). Such assistance to collapsed or failed states, also known as political engineering, gets right to the heart of the historically problematic relationship between the state and society in war torn countries like Sierra Leone, introducing a third party or parties to the usual two way channels of accountability flow. The introduction of third party interests to the developing world on the back of aid programming is not a new phenomenon but in the post-conflict environment it is relevant because *democratisation* is being promoted as part of peace-building and democratic governance is distinct from authoritarianism or partial democracy because of its *accountability to the community* (Potter, 1997:4).

As peace operations now aim to address the *causes of war* rather than focusing on ending the conflict, international programming for state reconstruction on the back of peace-building is contemporary and relevant and is associated with substantial mission budgets⁴. The new paradigm for peace operations is also relevant because failed states are of concern to the international community due to fears around organised crime and terrorism (ICG, 2004), globalisation, regional security, migration, environmental degradation and even neo-barbarianism theorising (Kaplan, 2000, Kaldor, 1999).

¹ The United Nations Mission to Sierra Leone 1999-2006

² see FCO statement on improving governance and access to power in Sierra Leone - <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1063633918237> – accessed 28/03/07

³ This trend has also become part of the development consensus as post-third wave developmentalists found that citizens in many developing countries were demanding political freedom and pluralism CAROTHERS, T. (2004) *Critical mission: essays on democracy promotion*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace..

⁴ Sierra Leone for example – the total estimated expenditures for the UNAMSIL, 1999 to 2006, was \$2.8 billion - <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unamsil/facts.html> - accessed 22/03/07

This paper aims to raise issues about locating accountability in post-conflict interventionist policy making and to invite discussion about the theoretical challenge for democratisation this issue poses. The questions raised by this paper are a. does foreign aid distort the location of accountability through a transnational body of political elites which either excludes local people or purports to represent them and if so, b. how is external intervention creating new mechanisms of accountability with the potential consequence of perpetuating the underlying sources of tension in Sierra Leone?

2. The collapsed state/society relationship

Weak or fragile states, failed states and certainly collapsed states generally create the right conditions for civil unrest and sometimes war (Kaldor, 1999); ironically, if war comes first, it has the capacity to create state failure from general state weakness or dysfunction through the destruction of economies, bureaucracies and infrastructures, making a bad situation worse. Despite the complex debates around the causal links for state dysfunction or collapse (Zartman, 1995b), it is manifest through excessive, unsustainable burdens on state capacity (Yoffee, 1988)⁵ and the consequent inability of the state to meet public demand. This culminates in the failure of a regime to impose control on its citizens allowing space for civil unrest and conflict, and Kaldor argues that the failed state is the context in which 'new wars'⁶ take place (Kaldor, 1999:91). For example, the absence of any plausible or legitimate political formulae which could assure basic levels of public welfare and security shrank nearly "to vanishing point" and resulted in state collapse in countries such as Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola (Clapham, 2001). Both Liberia and Sierra Leone are examples of dysfunctional and imploding states, descending into anarchy, collapse and protracted civil war as a result of years of state-mismanagement and exploitation.

There are various contributing factors to the collapse of a state including the mismanagement of resources and state funds, and the marginalisation of the population from both the political process and a stake in the system, breeding resentment among vulnerable groups. In a democratic state, Locke argued that authority is bestowed upon the individuals in society to demand government pursue the interests of the governed and a failure to do so would result in the removal from government of those who have failed in this task; civil society is the vehicle in which individual citizens may have such demands met (Held, 1996:80-81)⁷. In a democratic society, the type pursued by the international community on the African continent, the state should have a mutually dependent and reinforcing relationship with its citizens through civil society; law-abiding, tax paying citizens and accountable, representative government. Africans themselves have been enthusiastically pursuing this goal, a "monumental change" in state-society relations from the era of authoritarian or one-party systems moving towards a culture of political pluralism (Poku, 1998:214, Carothers, 1999).

⁵ cited by Zartman (1995)

⁶ Kaldor explains 'new wars' as a situation where civil conflict involves state breakdown, a range of armed groups and high civilian casualties and this definition is indicative of the civil war in Sierra Leone

⁷ Held on LOCKE, J. (1963) *Two treatises of government*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. (1963) and LASLETT, P. (1963) Introduction. In: *Two treaties of government*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.(1963)

However, a weak and disenfranchised society results in the inability of citizens and civil society to articulate and demand social reform and accountability from their government. This debility is relevant because, state collapse is closely related to the health of society. The function of the state as a decision-making, executing and enforcing body is greatly weakened by the incapacity of its citizens to hold it accountable (Hyden, 1992). Conversely, a dysfunctional state is incapable of nurturing social capital and a strong civil society (even if there was a will to do so) because of various constraints on limited resources and/or state capacity exacerbated by the inability of citizens to contribute to state coffers through taxation and so on. In this sense the interplay between weak state and weak society produces a self-fulfilling prophesy, the “degeneration of one necessarily entailing the debilitation of the other” (Zartman, 1995a:6).

State weakness and dysfunction over time and its subsequent collapse has a lasting impact on local people. After war, citizens lose faith in their government for their economic and physical security (ICG, 2004, Zartman, 1995b) and the relationship of trust between state and society, which is generally a ‘given’ in established democracies, fails to exist – if it existed before. The political history of Sierra Leone presents a strong tradition of electoral activity since independence in 1961. Regular elections were held throughout the post-colonial era, multi-party initially but predominantly single-party latterly. However, regular elections, a full franchise and enthusiastic popular participation were thwarted by the absence of any meaningful *representation*. ‘Electoral clientelism’, a system where the “electorate merely exchanged votes for special favours from party politicians” (Francis, 1999:146), was systematic and reflected the corrupt (or ‘traditional’) nature of the state, reinforced by the historical and cultural patrimonial characteristics of politics in that country. The most basic of services were denied many ordinary Sierra Leoneans throughout the post-independence era and by the onset of war, the country’s development was in a reverse decline (Luke, 1989). These experiences of state failure by ordinary citizens, of the failure of the state to serve them and protect them from basic socio-economic need and from marginalised and marauding teenagers wielding machetes and Kalashnikovs, have left deep psychological scars. In this sense, the responsibility the state bears for descent into war means that the building of trust and commitment, of duty and accountability, of a mutually responsive relationship, is paramount for sustainable peace. In Sierra Leone, the civil war was not fought around divisions of ethnicity or religion but more around state/society contempt and mistrust, around the breakdown in the relationship between the state and an important, powerful but marginalised group of disenfranchised youth. These realities mean that accountability in reconstruction, the perception that *all* sectors of the community are included in the political process and have the *power* to influence policy through effective representation, should not be constrained or distorted by outside influences, however well-intended these might be. Therefore, this involves a better understanding of the nuances and the detail in specific post-conflict environments and a sophisticated approach to democracy assistance programming by donors (Poulligny, 2006).

3. Democratisation in re-construction – the interventionist approach

Modern historical context for democratisation

The end of the Cold War, its strategically constructed alliances across Africa and the ‘victory’ of liberal democracy as an ideology (Fukuyama, 1989) gave the international

community great bargaining power when it came to political engineering (conditionalities) attached to aid for development and for post-conflict reconstruction. In the post-SAPs era, world attention became more focused on political conditionality rather than economic conditionality for sustainable aid flows (Clapham, 1996). For example in 1994, as a result of discrepancies and alleged corruption in tax administration, aid was withdrawn to the Tanzanian government by Norway and Sweden (Odd-Helge, 2003). In addition to democratic institution building, political engineering involved support for civil society where aid was also targeted. This search for civil society brought donors into a “direct engagement in social reconstruction which would previously have lain outside their accepted role” in terms of previously respected sovereignty norms (Clapham, 1996:197). Indeed, in delivering aid to Kenya, the United States by-passed the national government and went directly to NGOs in an explicit critique of political elites which went far beyond the “bounds of acceptable diplomacy” (ibid).

After the Cold War and with the vigour legitimised by “Fukuyaman certainty” (Poku, 1998), the international community launched a campaign of political enlightenment upon the African state with the goal of transferring “political technologies of universal validity” (Clapham, 1996:193) i.e. popular participation and democratisation. However, external pressure for change was not the only factor influencing the birth of a potential shift in the state/society relationship across the continent. African states themselves recognised that, as Communism had failed the ideological war, there was new impetus to declare allegiance to multi-party politics and fall in line with western norms and expectations, so in 1990 a new declaration was made by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)⁸ which acknowledged the need for popular participation in government. Even though this declaration was essentially rhetorical and demonstrated no real substance in the execution of political change, the declaration was an indication of the new strategic thinking being adopted by most African states. In addition to this rhetorical commitment by national governments, African citizens themselves pushed hard for democratic change through local NGOs and INGOs. International NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch were very influential in sensitising the international community to the abuse of power prevalent in many African states, particularly with regard to human rights (Clapham, 1996). So, the democratic rhetoric engaged actors at all levels; international, national and local; external and internal; governmental and non-governmental and in this sense the mandate for popular participation in sub-Saharan Africa was almost without exception, universal⁹.

Post-conflict democratisation

The multi-dimensional approach to reform is now accepted policy in the post-conflict environment and building civil society capacity together with support for an independent media are complimentary components of the democratisation agenda (Sesay, 2005). However, this process is complicated in post-conflict states as both state and society are weakened to the point of collapse and neither is capable of functioning within their normal roles. Zartman describes the phenomenon of the collapsed state as a situation

⁸ subsequently The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Africa Union (AU) all have democracy promotion mandates as has the EU through the Cotonou Agreement with the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific States

⁹ The obvious exceptions to this would be some traditional elites within Islam who hold that democracy is inappropriate for non-Western societies AYUBI, N. N. (1997) Islam and democracy. In: POTTER, D., GOLDBLATT, D., KILOH, M., LEWIS, L. (Ed.) *Democratization*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

where the “structure, authority ... law, and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some form, old or new” (Zartman, 1995a:1). As noted in the introduction above, during the 1990s UN peace operations received an extended mandate (multi-dimensional or integrated) to *build states* as part of peace-building through institutional reconstruction (Pouligny, 2006). This was a significant progression of the historical UN ‘peace-keeping’ only mandate for their operations in post-war zones. Such political engineering through the reconstruction (or in some cases *construction*) of sovereign state institutions was legitimised by the international community through the declared objective of ‘restoring democracy’ (ibid: 4). This integrated approach (and some commentators would describe it as an unrealistic approach) involves electoral, constitutional and judicial reform, and support to civil society and the media as well as the more predictable peace-building programming around disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), human rights (HR) and security sector reform (SSR). Democratisation in this context is *procedural* and the organisation of elections is a central component, often prioritised in peace-building, so that government can be legitimised and peace can be consolidated through full participation (Pouligny, 2006:240).

However, the relationship between democracy building and the re-construction of the state is still unclear and warrants further exploration (Carothers, 1999:111), as Ottaway notes, democratisation in the collapsed state is a “highly disruptive process” and can encourage more conflict before the necessary systems are in place to manage it; thus attempts at democracy in the wrong conditions can exacerbate tensions in society and accelerate the disintegration of the state (Ottaway, 1995). This is an extreme view but empirical evidence from post-conflict, mid-reconstruction, Sierra Leone reveals an interesting dichotomy of interests and methods which helps to understand the issues.

Sierra Leone

Popular participation and the “advancement of democracy in a socio-political framework free of inequality, nepotism and corruption” was brokered into the Lomé Peace Accord¹⁰ during the civil war in Sierra Leone and this triggered a diversity of activities programmed by donors including DfID, US AID, UNDP and the EC. The budget was large, reform of the National Election Commission (NEC) and activities for the 2002 and 2004 presidential/parliamentary/local elections involved a total spend of around £5 million¹¹ from Britain alone, for example. Assistance for the Special Court of Sierra Leone (SCWL) has been estimated at approximately \$58 million, the biggest contributor to this budget being the United States. The DfID project for reform and rebuilding the police had an estimated budget of \$22 million and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, brokered into the Lomé Peace Accord, was allocated around \$4.5 million of international funding, for example¹².

Registration and campaigning for the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for July 2007 took place in March 2007 and there was strong criticism from various

¹⁰ The Lomé Peace Accord, brokered in Togo between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front, 25/5/99 to the 7/7/99 - <http://www.sierra-leone.org/lomeaccord.html> - accessed 22/03/07

¹¹ field interview with research participant 7/2/07

¹² all figures sourced from SESAY, M. G., HUGHES, C. (2005) *Go beyond first aid: democracy assistance and the challenges of institution building in post-conflict Sierra Leone*. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations. 34.

quarters about the efficiency, honesty and autonomy of the NEC mostly, as would be expected, from the opposition parties¹³ but also from some civil society organisations¹⁴ who called upon their government to allocate more funds, more quickly, to the beleaguered NEC. Despite the sensationalist nature of the Sierra Leone press, arrests *have* been made in connection with ‘irregularities’ found during the registration process^{15 16}. However, the situation is clouded by the fact that donors are still continuing to support the NEC despite the objective being for government to run its own elections this time, with a ‘hands free’ approach by donors. Funds have been allocated through the UNDP ‘basket fund’ (a fund managing contributions from various donors for the election process) for the NEC, the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) and the Electoral Offences Courts, the largest contributor being the EC which has committed EUR 7.5 million (US\$10 Million) into the fund¹⁷. The NEC is therefore primarily accountable to its donors, not national government or local people reflecting the distortion in accountability flow. Whilst citizens are calling on their government to support NEC activities more effectively, international funding is channelled direct to the NEC and the accountability chain therefore by-passes national government¹⁸.

This is further complicated by the fact that political parties are not consulted in programming for or funding of the NEC (unlike national government). The exclusion of all interested parties breeds resentment, mistrust, and outright frustration on the part of political parties who feel they are being marginalised from a process which, historically, has been characterised by malpractice and corruption (Europa, 2002, CarterCentre, 2002, Cubitt, 2006). Suspicion that the incumbent party is ‘up to its tricks’ concerning manipulation of the NEC is exacerbated by excluding opposition parties¹⁹ and is manifest in the local press by accusation after accusation (and often counter-accusation) or corruption and fraud, which fuels social tension. Donors have historically shied away from support to political parties on non-partisan grounds but indirectly are being exactly that, partisan in respect of support to government and this issue is an area of current debate²⁰. In addition to this, large funding announcements such as the recent spend from the EC (above) lead citizens to believe that their government is in receipt of substantial amounts of donor aid to make their elections free and fair. The reality is that a large proportions of the aid will not be directly targeted at local issues, providing more accessible registration centres for example, a main bone of contention among civil society in Freetown during the registration period of March 2007, but will go to various intermediaries who are employed to ‘deliver’ the aid. It is estimated that around 60-65%²¹ of donor aid is disbursed in this way but that this detail rarely filters down to

¹³ “Electoral Fraud? Three NEC Staff Nabbed in Sierra Leone”, article published in Awareness Times, online news archive for Sierra Leone at http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_20055019.shtml - accessed 26/03/07

¹⁴ Charles Mambu of the Coalition of Civil Society Organisations interviewed by the author in November 2006 and writing in Awareness Times (ibid) Civil Society Coalition wants Voter Registration Extended in Sierra Leone at http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_20055022.shtml - accessed 26/03/07

¹⁵ interview by the author with UNIOSIL 13/03/07

¹⁶ it should be noted that most arrests have involved members of the opposition and not the government parties despite numerous allegations against the government itself

¹⁷ press release from UNIOSIL at <http://www.uniosil.org/read.asp?newsID=303&cat=> - accessed 26/03/07

¹⁸ information about the 2007 registration process was obtained from interviews in the field during March 2007

¹⁹ field interviews with opposition party leaders during the registration process March 2007

²⁰ see KING, O., DE ZEEUW, J. (2006) *Political party development in conflict prone societies*. The Hague: Clingendael Conflict Research Unit.

²¹ unsubstantiated estimates from various field interviews March 2007

citizens or civil society who form sometimes unrealistic expectations of their government²² adding to the confusion and this reality is exploited by opposition leaders. Accountability is being externalised in post-conflict Sierra Leone but in reality national government takes responsibility.

4. Participation, representation and accountability

The influence of external agents in the construction of democracy rather flies in the face of acknowledged theorising about transition and consolidation. A failure of government accountability can have serious consequences for the *popular legitimacy* of electoral democracy which is a core component of consolidation (Diamond, 1999:173). The presence of an international constituency complicates issues of participation and representation and ‘muddies the waters’ for accountability location. An irony considering that increased transparency and accountability in national government is a prioritised condition for sustainable aid²³.

Democracy promotion and assistance programming assumes various ‘realities’ about three key concepts for transition and consolidation; participation, representation and accountability. A full franchise, extensive voter education, access to registration/polling stations, multi-party politics, election observation and monitoring have all contributed to an enthusiastic response to elections in Sierra Leone. Voter turnout in 2002 was around 83% (CarterCentre, 2002). Donor supported NGOs such as the 50/50 Group directly targeted women through voter education and local training to ensure that this group understood the meaning and importance of participation and exercised its political rights to vote for representation. On the 20th March 2007, twenty thousand women mobilised in Freetown and attended the National Stadium to present their demands to President Kabbah²⁴ and in the 2007 registration process, the Chairperson of the NEC Dr Christiana Thorpe, stated that there has been a notable increase in the ratio of women to men registering compared to the elections of 2002. In addition, the national youth are being mobilised at local, regional and national levels, to participate in governance and ensure that their issues get heard²⁵. Sierra Leoneans are politically aware, they believe in their democracy and have mobilised to show their support for popular participation.

With regard to representation, the elections scheduled for 2007 will revert back to the constituency system now that boundaries have been redrawn in respect of changed demographics following the war (and incidentally the return to a constituency based system has been the cause of less accessible registration centres in some areas and many complaints among the opposition). Previously, the proportional representation system of 1996 and 2002 (district block system) meant that voters rarely knew the people who they were voting for as they were voting for a party list. The constituency based system is now giving cause for optimism that the ‘right people’ will get elected as they are known to their constituents, but in a culture where patrimony still rules, where clientelism is still the norm, it is not clear whether voters will be presented with a true democrat to vote for (Cubitt, 2006). International democracy promotion assumes that there is a *will* and *culture* among MPs to represent their constituents’ interests rather than their own

²² field interview with governments minister – 13/03/07

²³ Department for International Development press release 18/07/06, statement by Hilary Benn, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/pressreleases/standagainst.asp> - accessed 22/03/07

²⁴ field interview on 13/03/07

²⁵ interview with the Minister for Youth and Sport, Freetown 15/03/07

patrimonial and lineage networks and this represents a grave lack of understanding in respect of local culture and local practices. A further assumption is that the 'multi-party' system in Sierra Leone displays any of the norms and practices commonly associated with party politics in the western world i.e. debate, tolerance and respect for others' views vis-à-vis Weberian competitive party systems.

Donor programming is also 'blind' to the 'crossing the carpet' nature of African politics, the co-option of local chiefs to support the incumbent, and the 'curse' of public office experienced by many politicians (Jackson, 2004)²⁶ which means that an MP's 'constituency' has very little to do with the people who voted them into office. During numerous interviews in the field, the consensus was that politicians *never* fulfil their promises, not even at the most basic level, and that up until now citizens have been powerless to change this.

However, the re-introduction of local elections in 2004 (the first for 32 years and substantially supported by the donor community) has given local people renewed hope in their ability to change things. A recent example in the Northern Province shows how a politician, elected in 2004 on false promises, has been forced to resign from office by his local constituents²⁷ after a naming and shaming exercise in his constituency. This example would suggest an emerging channel of effective accountability in respect of the *localisation* of politics but what it also illustrates, is not just the fallibility and accountability of politicians at local level, but also the misunderstanding among local people as to the extent of funding which is actually reaching local government because it is being withheld at central level and in addition to this, *donor aid* in some areas of the provinces is being stifled by the corrupt demands of local elites who expect a cut. For example a local government official in one of the up-country provinces denied the charity, Concern, the right to deliver essential health services to local people unless he was paid an 'expenses fee'. Concern, which is funded by the Irish government, declined to pay the official's bribe and went through extensive high level consultations to pressurise central government to get the local official by-passed so that they could proceed with their health programming. An illustration of a further complication in accountability location.

A lot has been written about the patrimonial nature of politics in Africa (Richards, 1996, Jackson, 2004, Harrison, 2005, Jackson, 2005). Often referred to as corruption it could better be described as 'traditional politics' and indeed this has now been acknowledged by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Advancement to public office in many African states is a curse as well as a blessing; a curse in that accountability in public office is more to do with filtering resources through complex kinship networks and 'looking after one's own' than accountability to the nation's electorate per se. Political elites are not interested in a western notion of democracy when traditional allegiances are strong, where patrimonial networks, rent seeking and patron/client relations are considered 'natural', often acceptable phenomena and a different interpretation of the concept of democracy. However, what this 'corruption' means is the non-egalitarian share of state resources, a skewed and exclusory redistribution which is pervasive and deeply embedded in many African political norms. This 'traditional'

²⁶ Jackson (2004), in his in depth analysis of the political life of a member of parliament gives a useful account of the nature of public office, of the demands and expectations met upon politicians by their extended families and tribes, and their duty to their ancestral inheritance

²⁷ field interview March 2007

nature of politics is not confined to the level of the state. It is also evident in much of civil society²⁸ and into the international arena where favourable relationships between national government and the post-colonial power may have an influence on the extent to which external agents accept flawed democratic practices (Clapham, 1996).

The presence of external actors with big budgets and well defined agendas in the conflict-prone environment provides a situation where effectively western governments are acting as arbitrators, or indeed, negotiators between national or local government and civil society. But thrown into this mix are the interests of a collusion of external actors which complicate and blur the usual channels of participation, representation and accountability which could be normally be expected in a functioning liberal democracy.

5. The accountability nexus

Liberal democracy is usually a system where elected representatives protect and pursue the interests of their constituents. In post-conflict reconstruction there are multiple representatives and multiple constituencies. Clapham has argued that, post-Cold War, there has been a collaboration of interests focused on democratising the African continent (Clapham, 1996:196) and those interests can broadly be categorised as follows:

- a. The African public – discontent with the existing order
- b. International Financial Institutions such as the World Bank and IMF who are focused on ‘capitalising’ the continent through economic liberalisation
- c. International conglomerates and corporations, such as oil and other extractive industries wishing to enhance their business prospects and protect shareholders
- d. Western governments, inspired by Fukuyaman certainties, and pursuing a morale crusade to ‘enlighten’ and secure Africa through political reform
- e. Western public opinion - displaying outrage against atrocities, corruption and the general conditions which most Africans have to survive on a daily basis
- f. INGOs campaigning to protect the interests of the poor and marginalised

In the post-conflict situation, where reconstruction involves little less than state building, the diversity of actors, issues, programmes and beneficiaries, become very confusing and opaque. With the internationalisation of domestic politics, constituencies are now diffused across the globe representing a multitude of interests which are often conflicting and sometimes contradictory, and usually take precedence over local concerns. For example, a small but important project being developed by a local and well established NGO for the education of former combatants (many child soldiers) on Human Rights and the benefits of production rather than destruction in one of the up-country border towns where the war was first manifest, has been rejected by donors on the grounds that it does not fit their current agenda²⁹. This not only raises important questions about participation and representation but also means the erosion of popular sovereignty and diffusion of accountability to Africans themselves. A further example is that of the Sierra Leone Women’s Forum, a formidable coalition of women’s organisations which spearheaded the return to multi-partyism in 1996 by holding a

²⁸ field interview March 2007

²⁹ Field interview with head of prominent NGO in Freetown on . It should also be noted here that there were issues around the *presentation and timing* of proposals to donors with regard to whether or not they would be accepted as well as whether or not the proposed project was ‘in line’ with donors agendas.

national referendum and which recently successfully mobilised 20,000 members at the National Stadium to press President Kabbah on three archaic and discriminatory parts of the constitution. And yet funding received by this organisation is donated only on receipt of proposals which comply directly with donors' specified agendas and not with projects and programming of the greatest interest to local women³⁰. At the centre of this confusion, is the state: accountable to donors and other external agents as well as their citizens, what happens when priorities collide, when external aims and objectives are not in line with local need and where methods of delivery, methods of 'doing things' are not sensitive to or compatible with local procedures or norms? In some circumstances, donor projects have been withdrawn early due to perceived failures or inefficiencies and even with 'successful' projects which reach the end of their term, issues are raised about their sustainability, the effectiveness of any programming if it has a limited life in a society where local conditions, levels of education, infrastructure, limited resources such as electricity etc. constrain or disrupt the effective implementation of any programming over a short term.

If state sovereignty has been eroded through post-conditionality and interventionist approaches then the role of the nation state has been reduced to that of 'intermediary', a facilitating body to ensure the effective execution of donor programming. Nation states are involved in programme making, indeed, the international community cannot operate within sovereign borders without the permission of the state and yet conditionalities, peace accords, PRSPs and caveat type funding, restrict the power of the state to act autonomously, placing them in the position of a fine balancing act between donors, their own interests and those of their citizens. When most of the national budget is made up of international aid, collapsed states have little or no choice but to comply with donor wishes. The differences and ambiguities in western responses to African political systems and conditionality only add to the confusion around *who is* accountable. Programming undertaken by external agents should be transparent and the presentation of operations to civil society and other stakeholders should be honest and straightforward and open to redress if necessary (Feeney, 1998). It is unacceptable for donors to withdraw a programme when problems arise without seeking remedies from indigenous sources or engaging with local actors to find solutions. In addition, there should be some form of *independent* scrutiny and oversight (ibid). But, if the international community is ultimately accountable, then Easterly argues it has no system for checks and balances of democratic accountability because it is simply a bureaucratic mechanism which exists in isolation and as such does not bear responsibility for policy making or failure in policy programming and delivery (Easterly, 2006).

In the field of humanitarian aid and disaster relief, research has confirmed that accountability to beneficiaries is low but to donors it is high (Lawday, 2006). The current debate is around the link between better accountability and effectiveness, and the prevention of corruption and fraud, and in 2005 the UN pledged a "new initiative" to enhance accountability which will include a complaints handling system, localised surveys and sharing information about what beneficiaries *should expect* i.e. the purpose of aid agencies (The Fritz Institute, ibid). This accountability deficit has long been recognised in the humanitarian aid sector but there has been an even longer delay for a reaction to it. The issue is now becoming clear that local people or beneficiaries need a mechanism or mechanisms to give them the power to *demand accountability*, i.e. there

³⁰ field interview with Rosalie Makati of the SLWF, Freetown, 14/03/07

needs to be a beneficiary centred approach to align donor programming to local need and by so doing increase the efficiency and efficacy of such activities; which can only be of benefit to both donor and beneficiary. This is no less important in post-conflict reconstruction where the very nature of democracy (an accountability mechanism) is at stake, in very fragile societies.

6. Conclusions

Sierra Leone's political history of democracy has been characterised by authoritarianism, the paradox of regular 'democratic' elections but no means by which citizens or civil society could hold their government to account or remove the incumbent. In the post-war period, reconstruction aimed to change this situation by prioritising democratisation in the peace agreement to include all interested parties through multi-partyism³¹ and with a pledge to encourage more popular participation by increasing the capacity of civil society and an independent media to hold government to account. In essence, this is a redefinition of the social contract in formally authoritarian regimes (Pouligny, 2006:238). The irony is that the involvement of powerful third parties in the process has relocated the drivers and mechanisms of accountability. This in itself would not be so much of an issue if the aims and objectives of the third parties were the same as those of local people and to some extent, this is so. However, in some areas there does appear to be a conflict, not only in the sense of shared goals but also in the way those goals are achieved.

If there is consensus that "reconstruction of the sovereign state is necessary", that there is an "outright need" for this task to be assisted by external actors (Zartman, 1995b:272, Cliffe, 1999) and collapsed states themselves welcome external assistance, perhaps the process should not be called democratisation. For war torn citizens on the streets of Sierra Leone, it is relevant that their government is seen to be meeting their demands as far as is reasonable in such difficult circumstances, irrespective of who is actually funding that demand. But this distorted dynamic is not democracy.

³¹ It should be noted here that multi-partyism was mainly brought about by Sierra Leoneans themselves, in particular through women's activism (with some limited support from the international community) which successfully persuaded the ruling military regime, the NPRC, to hold multi party elections albeit on a proportional representation system in 1996.

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