

SIERRA LEONE IRELAND PARTNERSHIP

Éire í gComhar le Sierra Leone
Registered Charity CHY13975



Submission to the Consultation on Irish Aid

by the

Sierra Leone Ireland Partnership (SLIP)

April 2012

1. Introduction

1.1 The Sierra Leone Ireland Partnership (SLIP) is a voluntary organisation whose membership consists of Sierra Leoneans living in Ireland, former development workers, missionaries, and volunteers who lived and worked for some time in Sierra Leone. Among SLIP's members experience of working in Sierra Leone stretches back over the past sixty years.

1.2 SLIP works to keep Sierra Leone issues before the public and Government. SLIP has lobbied for greater aid investment in Sierra Leone, and has assisted Sierra Leone students and others who have come to study and work in Ireland.

1.3 SLIP also organizes an annual reception to mark Sierra Leone's Independence Day.

1.4 This submission is made in response to the questions posed in Irish Aid's review consultation document. It aims to provide a perspective on the questions that is essentially Sierra Leone focused. In doing so SLIP fully recognizes that the review is not couched in country specific terms. Nevertheless SLIP believes that such a perspective can offer useful insights to Irish Aid for the review and, so, for shaping policy for the coming years.

1.5 The submission draws on views of SLIP's membership as well as on views expressed at a recent half-day seminar in All Hallows College, Dublin, jointly convened by SLIP and the Liberia Support Group to discuss the review.

1.6 In making this submission SLIP wishes to point out that Sierra Leone is the Sub-Saharan African country with which Ireland, historically, has had the longest contact. Irishmen and women served in Sierra Leone from its establishment as a colony in the early nineteenth century. Records of Irish people in Sierra Leone celebrating St Patrick's Day date from 1819. The longest thread of Irish contacts commenced in the 1860s when the first Irish missionaries arrived to establish schools, orphanages and health centres, eventually managing over two hundred primary and secondary schools and several hospitals. Today, Irish based aid agencies continue that work in similar sectors as well as in several others.

2. Progress Made

Has the Government been successful in meeting the commitments made in the White Paper on Irish Aid?

2.1 With respect to the various programmes in Sierra Leone directly and indirectly supported by Irish Aid the record is undoubtedly positive. With recent expenditure of approximately €5m Irish Aid's direct investment, while modest, is focused on critical needs in health, food security and peace building. In addition Irish Aid supports programmes of a

number of Ireland based aid agencies active in Sierra Leone, such as: Trócaire, Concern, Plan Ireland, Christian Aid, and Goal, among others.

2.2 In health, Irish Aid's focus on maternal and child care is entirely appropriate and the improvements for the country as a whole in obstetrics and neonatal care are to be welcomed. Indeed health has long been a focus of Irish involvement in Sierra Leone. Hospitals, established by Irish missionaries, at Serabu, Segbwema, Lunsar and Panguma pioneered this focus, along with community health care programmes. For recent improvements Irish Aid can take credit for an important share of the progress and SLIP advocates the maintenance and development of this focus on health.

2.3 Support for initiatives to deal with gender based violence is also highly appropriate, though much more needs to be done in tackling an issue that requires leadership from all sectors of public life, nationally and locally, if it is to effectively addressed.

2.4 The effects of peace building initiatives are much less amenable to direct measurement. However, the relatively stable political situation that has been evident in Sierra Leone since the return to fully functioning democratic institutions, has been a very positive development. The forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections will, hopefully, be conducted in a peaceful atmosphere and fully in accordance with constitutional procedures, with the outcomes being widely accepted.

2.5 Overall, however, given that Sierra Leone still hovers close to the bottom of the UN's Human Development Index (HDI), the impact of aid, whether from Ireland or from elsewhere, does not seem to be significantly affecting this ranking.

2.6 Sierra Leone's HDI value for 2011 was 0.336—in the lowest human development category—positioning the country at 180 out of 187 countries and territories. Between 1980 and 2011, Sierra Leone's HDI value increased from 0.248 to 0.336, an increase of 36.0 per cent or average annual increase of about 1.0 per cent.

2.7 The HDI of Sub-Saharan Africa as a region increased from 0.365 in 1980 to 0.463 today, placing Sierra Leone below the regional average. Nevertheless, it has to be acknowledged that some progress has been made in recent years given that Sierra Leone's score has increased from 0.252 in 2000 and from 0.319 in 2007 .

2.8 When the current HDI is examined more closely its various sub-rankings reveal continuing high levels of infant mortality, notwithstanding the progress noted above, lower participation rates in education than targeted, high attrition rates and high levels of illiteracy as well as considerable levels of gender inequality. Sierra Leone is, therefore, likely to fall short of MDG targets.

2.9 Obviously all these factors pose considerable challenges. The initiatives supported by Irish Aid and by other donors are helping to meet these challenges. However, the question

must be posed why a country so rich in natural resources, with a long tradition of formal education, and with the potential to achieve considerable levels of self-sufficiency in food, is not yet exploiting its wealth and the opportunities it provides, to the greater benefit of all its people, the ravages of the civil war notwithstanding?

2.10 This question will become more acute as Sierra Leone begins to achieve significant GDP growth, predicted by some to be over 30%, - growth that will be mainly driven by the revival of the mining industry.

2.11 This is a question that donor countries must address more directly with respect to governance, to strategic planning and to the overall delivery and impact of aid and government programme.

3. Global and Domestic Context

What are the implications of the changes in the global and domestic context for the Government's aid programme in the future and how will these affect current priorities?

3.1 It is clear that the international and national circumstances in which aid operates have changed very significantly over the past three years. The international and national economic recessions, so closely intertwined, have constrained the amount of funding available for all Government programmes, international aid included.

3.2 In conjunction with the economic recession events in the political domain have given rise to considerable questioning of Government and have added considerably to demands for greater openness and transparency in decision making and in the expenditure of all public funds, international aid being no exception.

3.3 To the economic and political circumstances have been added major concerns related to climate change and food security.

3.4 With respect to the funding of international aid the Irish public remains broadly positive. People appreciate that while their own circumstances may be less favourable than during the 'Celtic Tiger' era, the circumstances of people in countries like Sierra Leone are so much more unfavourable. The obligation to continue supporting international aid is not, therefore, in serious question. However, since the percentage of national income will go up or down according to the state of the national economy, 70 cents in every €100, the UN recommendation, can be far less than the Irish people believe the country is spending on international aid. Targets need to be clearer and the public kept fully informed as to the funding, nature and impact of aid programmes.

3.5 Linked to these issues is an increasing focus on the need for recipient countries' governments to demonstrate to donors that they are responding effectively to the challenges of raising living standards, eliminating poverty, providing adequate health care, education, infrastructure etc. for their citizens. It will not be sufficient, therefore, that Irish Aid demonstrates the effectiveness of its support for Sierra Leone, the Sierra Leone government must also demonstrate that it is properly addressing the needs for which it is in receipt of Irish Aid support.

3.6 To address these concerns, SLIP welcomes and recognizes the significance of Ireland having endorsed the *New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States* (2012) which commits to supporting 'country led and country owned transitions out of fragility'. The *New Deal*, also endorsed by Sierra Leone, places a greater onus on fragile states to accept ownership of the programmes intended to lead them out of their current circumstances. The *New Deal* requires the states in question to enter into compacts to implement development plans, to monitor progress according to agreed metrics and to ensure 'inclusive and participatory' political dialogue.

3.7 SLIP further welcomes the *New Deal* commitment to 'build trust by providing aid and managing resources more effectively and aligning these resources for results ... enhancing transparency, risk management to use country systems, strengthening national capacities and timelines of aid, improving the speed and predictability of funding to achieve better results'. Honouring these commitments will go a long way towards reassuring the public as to the positive impact of aid expenditure.

Climate Change

3.8 Practical issues related to climate change that affect Sierra Leone such as deforestation and its side effects, are of grave international concern. The serious and accelerating rate of deforestation in Sierra Leone is not only threatening biodiversity and ecosystem balance in the country but is contributing to global climate change. Decades of deforestation in Sierra Leone has reduced forest cover by over 70% and due to the underdeveloped nature of the country's industrial sector, the emissions from deforestation present the country's chief contribution to climate change.

3.9 Action to prevent further environmental and ecological damage from deforestation, as well as adequate investment in future forestry needs, are matters that should be urgently raised by donors with the Sierra Leone government.

4. Key Issues

How should the Government respond to the key issues of: hunger, fragility, climate change, basic needs, governance and human rights and gender equality? Are there other issues?

4.1 The agenda of issues listed in this question depend for adequate address, in the first instance, on the existence of effective **governance**. However, as the situation in Ireland itself has demonstrated government structures on their own are inadequate in fully tackling such issues in ways that guarantee widespread trust and confidence in their effectiveness.

4.2 In this respect Sierra Leone is no different to other countries, particularly countries emerging from protracted and intense conflict, often designated *fragile* states. Healthy and stable political institutions will not be developed in isolation, nor will they be sufficient on their own. Healthy and stable political institutions need a vibrant civil society and free media, both committed and willing to question, examine, criticize and propose alternatives, all operating in a context that is fully observant of basic human rights providing security for their citizens.

4.3 Together with other international donors the Irish Government should encourage the development of vibrant civil society organizations along with free media and, where necessary and possible, provide assistance by means of training for their personnel.

4.4 In terms of governance, Irish support for parliament and local government authorities should be examined, again in association with other international providers already operating in this sphere. Ireland's own conflict resolution experience has much to offer and could be made available, where appropriate, in areas like political party development, consensus building, parliamentary and local government procedures, the functioning of human rights and equality agencies, education for reconciliation, policing and judicial reform.

4.5 Effective governance must be accompanied by appropriate **economic** investment. Here also Ireland's experience should have much to offer. Among the areas in which Irish Aid is well placed to offer assistance are agriculture and the whole agri-food sector.

4.6 To address food security and improve livelihoods, the report of the Hunger Task Force rightly identifies the need to increase investment in this sector, particularly focusing on increasing smaller holder productivity. In Sierra Leone the soil is rich and agricultural produce includes rice, coffee, cocoa, tea, spices, tropical fruits and sugar, all with the potential of being developed, not only for the local market, but also for export in both raw and processed forms. While Sierra Leone is already benefiting from increased investment in agriculture the pace and intensity of that investment needs to be significantly increased.

4.7 However, SLIP wishes to express concern about the arrival of large foreign agri-businesses which to date have acquired rights over approximately 20% of Sierra Leone's land. Such businesses can play positive roles in developing the industry, but their presence

should not be to the detriment of indigenous farmers whose rights should be vigorously upheld and where surrendered must be justly compensated for their significant loss of earning opportunities.

4.8 The historic role of rural cooperatives and credit unions in Ireland's own economic and social development might well have positive lessons applicable in Sierra Leone. Likewise, the considerable experience of agencies like Enterprise Ireland and the Industrial Development Agency could be made available at minimal cost to assist Sierra Leone attract foreign investment, promote local investment and expand exports.

4.9 The Irish Government's new emphasis on developing **trade** with African countries indicates a welcomed shift from an exclusive emphasis on dependency towards one which will increasingly emphasize mutual benefit in relationships with developing countries. While trade between Ireland and Sierra Leone is minimal, opportunities for increasing trade between our two countries should be encouraged, particularly by identifying investment opportunities for Irish companies in Sierra Leonean enterprises.

4.10 Since the extractive industries contribute a significant proportion of Sierra Leone's exports SLIP wishes to express another concern regarding the terms and conditions under which enterprises in this sector are granted a licence to operate. While not directly an international aid issue, extractive enterprises, in which Irish interests may have an investment, should be required to engage in contracts that ensure a just return to the people of Sierra Leone, in terms of remuneration for local employees, in terms of benefits to the local communities where such enterprises operate, and in terms of revenue to the country as a whole.

4.11 Underpinning economic and social development in any country is a sound **education** system. In Ireland's own case the implementation of recommendations from the *Investment in Education* report of the 1960s laid the foundation for much of the country's skills needs and consequent economic growth over subsequent decades. The expansion of educational opportunities in Ireland focused on second and third level and Irish Aid should be in a position, together with other donors, to mobilize some of this experience to assist Sierra Leone expand and develop provision at these same levels.

4.12 In common with many sub-Saharan countries Sierra Leone experiences a considerable 'brain drain' particularly affecting third level education and depriving the country of critically needed professional expertise. As a means of overcoming this deficit in third level education, at least for the short term, teaching and research partnerships between Irish and Sierra Leone institutions should be encouraged. Drawing on Ireland's recent focus on research to promote the country's economic and social development, joint projects which emphasize problem solving and innovation around economic development should be explored. Such partnerships can be greatly facilitated by communication technologies and would not necessarily entail considerable costs. Experience gained by the Irish-African Partnership for Research Capacity Building should be of benefit in promoting such research. Opportunities also exist for recently retired personnel from second and third level institutions and from the public sector generally to spend some time in Sierra Leone assisting capacity building. Irish Aid could play a brokering role in mobilizing such assistance.

5. Focus for the Future

Given the limited resources and the need to focus these, which issues should the Government prioritize in its future aid programme?

5.1 The main focal points for the future have already been identified in responses to earlier questions.

5.2 Overall SLIP proposes that in light of its very low HDI Irish Aid designate Sierra Leone as a **programme country**, possibly in conjunction with neighbouring Liberia, a country which shares many of the same problems as Sierra Leone. In making this proposal SLIP is mindful of the constraints on current budgets. However, in assessing progress in existing programme countries it may be that some countries presently in this category will be deemed to have attained levels of development that no longer warrant the designation and the scale of support consequently enjoyed. Indeed the ultimate objective is that countries move out of the designation, allowing years to be considered. As has been pointed out Sierra Leone not only ranks amongst the lowest on the HDI scale, it is also a country with which Ireland has many links over than one hundred and fifty years.

6. Strengthening Ways of Working

How can the Government further strengthen its ways of working in delivering an effective aid programme, with a view to delivering real results in poverty reduction?

6.1 By definition international aid programmes should be finite, the ultimate aim being to have sufficient capacity developed in recipient countries as to eliminate the need for aid and for its replacement by the normal engagements which should characterize inter-state relationships.

6.2 Realistically, in the case of countries like Sierra Leone the economic development necessary to achieve the elimination of poverty will not happen overnight. However, it should not be concluded that significant poverty-reduction cannot be achieved within an attainable timeframe – many examples of countries doing so exist.

6.3 In order to maintain an effective aid programme the Government needs to strengthen its two-pronged approach in assisted countries. This means strengthening its engagement with relevant government authorities to ensure maximum impact, doing so unilaterally as well as in a multilateral context. Secondly, it means strengthening its engagement with and support for civil society and other agencies working to improve conditions and outcomes on

the ground. Such engagements need to be informed with sound evidence as to the most effective strategies.

6.4 Finally, effective aid programmes need the continuing support of the Irish people on whose behalf the Government is funding these programmes. This requires ongoing engagement with NGOs and other organs of civil society throughout Ireland with an interest in international development, as well as with society at large.

6.5 Irish Aid has a well recognised reputation for its programmes and SLIP is confident it will enhance that reputation in the next phase of its work.

6.6 SLIP remains available to dialogue with Irish Aid whenever appropriate on matters pertaining to Sierra Leone.

SLIP contact: Chairperson, Geraldine Horgan,



