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# TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN SIERRA LEONE: CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION

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## Abstract

*The Sierra Leone civil war that ended in January 2002 was particularly brutal and left the country economically devastated. Four-and-a-half years later, Sierra Leone was selected as one of two countries to receive focussed attention from the newly created United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). The PBC is mandated to support post-conflict recovery and sustainable development with the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society. Drawing on field research and theories of sustainable peacebuilding and the role of civil society, this paper assesses the PBC's performance in Sierra Leone in its first year of operation. The article concludes that the PBC needs to clarify its priorities in relation to civil society participation in order to fulfil its potential to assist governments in promoting sustainable peace and development.*

## Introduction

The theoretical, practical and institutional linkages being made between peacebuilding and development by scholars, policy-makers and practitioners in the field have grown rapidly in the past few decades. With the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) following the 2005 World Summit,<sup>1</sup> these linkages have entered a new level of coordination between governments, international financial institutions (IFIs), UN agencies and international and local NGOs and civil societies in countries engaged in peacebuilding.

The creation of the new advisory body was widely supported as its mandate clearly attempted to fill a gap in the UN's management, coordination and sustained attention to post-conflict peacebuilding activities. In particular, the PBC was intended to 'bridge the gap between the Security Council's "security" lens and the "development" lens of the international financial institutions, the UN development system, and the donors'. (CIC-IPI 2008:13). The emphasis on peacebuilding as a foundation for development is reflected in the main purposes identified for the new commission (UN 2005):

- To bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery;
- To focus attention on the reconstruction and institution-building efforts necessary for recovery from conflict and to support the development of integrated strategies in order to lay the foundation for sustainable development; and

- To provide recommendations and information to improve the coordination of all relevant actors within and outside the UN, to develop best practices, to help to ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities, and to extend the period of attention given by the international community to post-conflict recovery.

The PBC Organisational Committee comprises a broad and geographically representative membership, including seven members selected by the Security Council, seven members elected by the Economic and Social Council, five based on financial contributions, five based on military contributions, and seven elected by the UN General Assembly (UN 2005). In order to affect peacebuilding on the ground, the PBC engages with individual countries through country-specific meetings (CSMs) which are held periodically in New York. In addition to members of the Organisational Committee and government representatives of the country concerned, relevant regional actors, representatives from the UN country teams, and IFIs and the regional development banks participate in the CSMs.

While the resolutions establishing the PBC emphasised the primary responsibility of national and transitional governments for post-conflict peacebuilding, they also encouraged the PBC to 'consult with civil society, non-governmental organisations, including women's organisations, and the private sector engaged in peacebuilding activities' (UNGA Resolution 60/180 2005). In order to facilitate such wider consultation, CSMs in New York have been supplemented by field missions, videoconferencing with key stakeholders, and thematic and other special briefings with high-level UN officials and relevant experts (UN 2007:4).

The Security Council referred Burundi and Sierra Leone to the Peacebuilding Commission on 23 June 2006 after they asked to be considered as cases for country-specific focus. In both countries, peacekeeping missions had helped to establish stability, and in both cases, the need for consolidation of peacebuilding efforts was seen as a priority with which the PBC could assist. On 19 July 2006, the first informal CSMs focussed on these two countries, and the first formal CSM for Sierra Leone was held on 12 October 2006. Over the next 14 months, the PBC held another 11 informal and two formal CSMs on Sierra Leone, leading up to the formal CSM held on 12 December 2007 at which the PBC adopted the Sierra Leone Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework. In the framework, the government and the PBC expressed their mutual commitment to six critical and interdependent priorities for risk reduction and peace consolidation (PBC 2007:4). Meanwhile, the PBC's 'Working Group on Lessons Learned' held its first meeting in February 2007, focussing on the upcoming elections, and in March 2007 the PBC conducted its first field mission to Sierra Leone, followed by a visit by the CSM chairperson in October 2007.

Drawing on field research conducted during November and December 2006, this paper focusses on assessing the work of the PBC during the initial period of engagement with Sierra Leone until the adoption of the Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework in December 2007. In particular, the paper assesses the PBC's performance in Sierra Leone in terms of local civil society participation and empowerment, coordination and sustainability, by drawing on field research experience and theories of sustainable peacebuilding and the role of civil society. Research was conducted in Sierra Leone in order to assess the needs and expectations of civil society in relation to justice, reconciliation and peacebuilding.<sup>2</sup> More than 60 interviews were conducted with ex-combatants, victims and officials, and meetings were held with representatives of 15 local non-government organisations and civil society groups in each of the country's four main regions.<sup>3</sup> Research also covered participation in a civil society 'core group' meeting in Freetown to discuss the upcoming second national consultation on the PBC, and interviews with the civil society representative who attended the Sierra Leone CSMs in 2006.

The PBC provides a unique potential opportunity to institutionalise civil society participation in peacebuilding by forging 'a much more direct relationship between international and local

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communities' that can act as a source of strength and support for national governments in the peacebuilding process (Chopra & Hohe 2004:259). However, as will be argued in this paper, in its crucial first year of operations when the Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework was being developed, the PBC procedures for CSMs

and their location in New York did little to encourage the effective participation of civil society actors from Sierra Leone, despite international and local civil society efforts to ensure representation and opportunities for consultation.<sup>4</sup>

## Sustainable Peacebuilding and Civil Society

The UN Security Council (2001) defined peacebuilding as a process 'aimed at preventing the outbreak, the recurrence or continuation of armed conflict' that 'encompasses a wide range of political, developmental, humanitarian and human rights programmes and mechanisms'. It adds that 'short- and long-term actions tailored to the particular needs of societies sliding into conflict or emerging from it' are required, and that these actions should focus on 'fostering sustainable institutions in areas such as sustainable development, the eradication of poverty and inequalities, transparent and accountable governance, the promotion of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law and the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence'.<sup>5</sup> These peacebuilding goals and activities were subsequently categorised by the UN into four sectors: security and public order; governance and participation; socio-economic wellbeing; and justice and reconciliation (UN 2006).

Peacebuilding theorist/practitioners John Paul Lederach, Luc Reyhler and others have highlighted coordination across these sectors and relationship building as critical factors in sustainable peacebuilding. Lederach (1997:20) argues that peacebuilding is a dynamic process that involves a transformation in relationships between people as well as the ending of violence. According to Reyhler (2006a), it must be understood as a complex system that involves complex change: 'it involves concurrent activity by many people in different sectors, at several levels, and in different timeframes'. Integral to the trans-disciplinary approach required for developing a sustainable peacebuilding architecture is recognising the need for integrating and coordinating peacebuilding activities that focus on the 'software' of communications and relationships as well as the 'hardware' of structures and institutions (Reyhler 2006a, 2006b).

To be sustainable, a transformative peacebuilding process must be based on recognition of the particular cultural and conflict context. Lederach (2000:55) argues that a realistic peace process requires 'the tools of contextualisation and empowerment'. Reyhler (2006a) also maintains that 'contextual judgment is more important than knowledge of the 10 best peacebuilding practices in other situations' and that 'a high level of internal and external legitimacy or approval' is one of the critical components of a sustainable peace. Stover and Weinstein (2004) similarly emphasise the importance of social reconstruction being contextualised and adapted to each unique post-war setting and being informed by the opinions, attitudes and needs of the local population. There is a need to recognise and build on the capacities for peace present in a society and to avoid creating cultural dissonance by imposing inappropriate mechanisms and processes 'disconnected from the fundamental worldview of the people involved' (Sutherland 2005:46).

It stands to reason that a key element of contextualising peacebuilding is the effective participation of civil society in peacebuilding processes. However, the democratisation of peacebuilding is not a simple process, and the implementation of principles and models for civil society participation is a relatively recent development. The World Bank, for

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example, has proposed the idea of a joint platform where donor organisations can discuss and reflect on the experiences of civil society and peacebuilding (Barnes 2006:25). The International Peace Institute (IPI) has conducted a civil society programme focussing on the challenges of democratisation and civil society in the Great

Lakes region of central Africa (Issaka & Bushoki 2005), while the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict has produced a discussion paper on civil society cooperation with governments in preventing wars and building peace (Barnes 2006).

According to Barnes (2006:11), 'local ownership of peacebuilding is likely to result in more legitimate processes and sustainable outcomes'. Barnes provides a model of engagement required between states and domestic and international civil society, potentially mediated by intergovernmental organisations or multilateral agencies, where there is mistrust and lack of cooperation between the national government and civil society organisations (CSOs). In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda, for example, national governments were seen to be supporting civil society groups 'only insofar as this has served their purposes, but they have stifled the groups when reciprocal support has been required' (Issaka & Bushoki 2005:7). The IPI report concludes that the three central African governments should 'consider civil society organisations as collaborators and partners in the advancement of peace and democracy and not as antagonists, as they all hold stakes in the security and peace of their countries and the region' (Issaka & Bushoki 2005:8).

This paper assesses how effectively the PBC fulfils the role advocated by Barnes (2006:18) in 'facilitating and creating space for constructive dialogue and productive engagement between governments and civil society representatives' as well as in supporting a more coordinated and holistic approach to sustainable peacebuilding and development.

## Peacebuilding and Development Priorities in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's brutal civil war ended in January 2002, leaving a devastated population to cope with the aftermath. While the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) had been responsible for most of the atrocities, including amputations, rape and murder, other groups were also accused of perpetrating crimes against humanity. Child soldiers were abducted and recruited, and many chose to join the Civilian Defence Forces to defend themselves against the rebel attacks. Large sections of the population were displaced and community bonds disrupted, with amputees living in separate resettlement areas, and former RUF combatants concentrated in regional towns such as Makeni where they held their last stronghold. In other areas, the population has become more mixed, with ex-combatants living quietly among the general population, often afraid to be identified and stigmatised. Refugees returning from Guinea and Liberia may not have returned to their villages of origin, and many of those who were displaced during the war have resettled where they fled, some in the overcrowded suburbs of Freetown.

Income from mining and the diamond trade was diverted to finance the war and increase the fortunes of political leaders, leaving the country economically devastated, with widespread



poverty and limited infrastructure and few basic services to support development. In 2006, garbage collection was non-existent and the electricity supply to the capital, Freetown, was unreliable. Taxes and income from the diamond trade were not flowing transparently into government coffers. In interviews with the author at the end of 2006, Sierra Leoneans said they saw the government – then headed by long-time President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah – and political structures as corrupt. Distrust of the President's motivations was widespread: he was neither seen to have the interests of his people at heart nor to prioritise development. Many interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the government's ability to provide basic services and with the lack of commitment to good governance and responsible leadership.<sup>6</sup>

Unemployed ex-combatants, amputees and other victims of war in Bo, Makeni and Freetown typically complained in interviews that despite the peace, 'development is not happening and poverty is increasing, which leads to corruption' and that 'justice is only there for rich people in Sierra Leone'. Amputees were socially marginalised with limited community support, lacked shelter and jobs, and often resorted to begging in the streets. They pleaded for more government and UN attention to health and education as well as housing. On the other hand, ex-combatants also felt ostracised, reporting that they had not received sufficient support to reintegrate into their communities. Ex-combatants who had been imprisoned in Freetown's Pademba Road prison said in interviews that Sierra Leoneans were 'finding it difficult to reintegrate us', that the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) training was inadequate, and that their resettlement was not monitored or followed up.

The 2007 elections that brought a reformist government into power may have inspired renewed optimism, but the new government still faces considerable challenges. Despite recent strong economic growth, the country remains very poor and its human development index is 176<sup>th</sup> out of 177 countries. According to a 2007 report of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, unemployment among youths was at 65%, and tens of thousands of former combatants were making a living in urban centres from petty trading, narcotic drug peddling, prostitution and theft (IRIN 2007). These conditions are reminiscent of the reasons cited by analysts such as David Keen (2005) for the involvement of so many Sierra Leoneans in the civil war: grievances and discontent based on economic inequalities and lack of opportunities to access education, health care and jobs.

Governance and participation, including respect for human rights and the rule of law, are critical factors in Sierra Leone's transition from war to sustainable peace. Of itself, democratically elected, representative government cannot guarantee either stability or development. Hirsch (2001:105) argues that 'peace and stability will require the transformation of Sierra Leone's political culture' to one where the country's political elite

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place 'commitment to the nation above self-aggrandisement and personal enrichment'. Systems and institutions to ensure civil society participation and the eradication of corruption are essential to the promotion of responsible governance and sustainable peacebuilding and development. The 2004 Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Report

captured much of this sentiment, identifying and analysing the many challenges facing Sierra Leone in its transformation to a peaceful society. The challenges identified included bad governance; endemic corruption and poverty; disenchanted youth; a repressive political system; legacies of the divide-and-rule policy of the former colonial administration, notably the uneven development that neglected much of the interior; persistence of capital punishment; a sclerotic elite; autocratic chiefs; a largely elderly elite that looked down on

youth; and a patrimonial political system which excluded most citizens. The government was required to implement the recommendations of the TRC Report, but implementation has been slow and hampered by limited dissemination and the lack of institutional and financial support to set up a follow-up committee to be coordinated by the Human Rights Commission. In the meantime, civil society groups in Sierra Leone have monitored progress and called for the TRC recommendations to be implemented. The recommendations cover protection of human rights; establishment of the rule of law; strengthening security services; promoting good governance; fighting corruption; focussing policies on youth, women and children; relations with regional and other external actors; control of mineral resources and income; reparations; reconciliation; and the National Vision for Sierra Leone. The implementation of the TRC Report recommendations and additional support for the Human Rights Commission were subsequently included as a specific government commitment in the Sierra Leone Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework (PBC 2007:9).

Even before the PBC took up the case of Sierra Leone, the country had produced a number of frameworks and strategy documents for peace and development. Before the war ended officially in January 2002, the IMF used a lull in the fighting as an opportunity to introduce a 'Poverty Reduction Growth Facility' and Sierra Leone subsequently developed a Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) building on the priorities identified in the TRC Report and the national visioning exercise, 'Sweet Salone 2025'. Several other policy and programmatic frameworks and strategies were developed at the national level, including the Security Sector Reform Programme (SSR), UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and, in 2006, a Peace Consolidation Strategy (PCS) which reflected the priorities outlined in the PRS, SSR, UNDAF and the mandate of the UN Integrated Office for Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL).<sup>7</sup> The PCS proposed specific programme interventions to promote capacity building and attitudinal change necessary to create the conditions conducive to implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and identified five key longer-term objectives to address the challenges to: internal security; national reconciliation; accountability of national institutions; building a culture of respect for human rights; economic empowerment; and building an 'infrastructure for peace' (UNIOSIL 2006).

The development of the Peace Consolidation Strategy involved consultations with relevant actors including civil society, academics and international partners. UN development and human rights agencies – among them UNDP and UNHCR, along with the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Political Affairs, as well as UNAMSIL and the UN Country Team in Sierra Leone – facilitated workshops and consultations with national and international government and non-government stakeholders in November 2005 and again in July 2006, and advocated that this participatory approach be continued in relation to Sierra Leone's engagement with the PBC.

The Sierra Leone Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework adopted on 3 December 2007 thus recognised the contributions and achievements of the previous policy frameworks

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and strategies for peace and development. It was intended to engage the international community in the medium term in supporting the government to address the 'threats and challenges most critical to sustaining and consolidating peace' – which it identified as youth employment and

empowerment, justice and security sector reform, consolidation of democracy and good governance, capacity-building, the energy sector, and sub regional dimensions of peacebuilding. (PBC 2007: 3). The Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework emphasised the principles of national ownership, mutual accountability and sustained engagement; the

need to address the root causes of the conflict as outlined in the TRC Report; and the importance of the full participation of stakeholders, including central and local governments, civil society, the private sector and international partners (PBC 2007:2). However, despite these principles and good intentions, civil society in Sierra Leone faced significant challenges in contributing to the peacebuilding process during the PBC's first year of engagement.

## The PBC and Civil Society Participation in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone civil society has a tradition of protests and campaigns to influence government policies going back to before the civil war (Gberie 2005; Hirsch 2001). During the civil war, some 60 NGOs and CSOs formed a 'National Coordinating Committee for Peace' in early 1995 to bring the government and RUF to the negotiating table. Later that year, a coalition of women's groups, trade unionists, journalists, local council leaders, paramount chiefs and academics lobbied for elections to be held despite the ongoing war (Lord 2000:43; Hirsch 2001:130). Formed after the 1997 coup, the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone, comprising Islamic and Christian organisations, helped in 'facilitating dialogue and building confidence' among conflict parties before and after the Lomé peace talks of July 1999 (Lord 2000:53). During the Lomé talks, President Kabbah convened a national consultative conference in Freetown that brought together 'a broad range of civil society actors ostensibly to help determine the government's position', although civil society was allowed little opportunity to influence the outcome (Hirsch 2001:80). Nevertheless, this experience has encouraged the re-emergence of civil society networks in Sierra Leone that could respond to the PBC consultative process. However, these networks need assistance to develop capacity to engage with local issues and to participate in forums such as the PBC.

The opportunity provided by the PBC for more effective consultation between the government, intergovernmental agencies and civil society representatives could help address the weaknesses of previous international efforts to promote peace and sustainable development in Sierra Leone. As argued by Hirsch (2001:100), the UN's greatest difficulty in resolving the conflict in Sierra Leone was 'lack of interagency coordination and poor interaction with the large and diverse international NGO community'. Institutional rivalries and lack of effective

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coordination between intergovernmental agencies including the UN, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and European Union (EU) reduced their effectiveness in promoting development and good governance in Sierra Leone (Hirsch 2001:100-1). In particular, complex regulations and closed-door procedures excluded civil

society participation and resulted in 'a lack of transparency and resonance' in the planning and implementation of IMF and WB programmes (Hirsch 2001:101). Unfortunately, the potential for productive civil society engagement with the government and intergovernmental agencies was not fulfilled in the first year of PBC operations. The PBC's first formal CSM held in New York on 12 October 2006 agreed, before arrangements for civil society participation were in place, on four critical areas requiring attention in Sierra Leone: youth unemployment and disempowerment; justice and security sector reform; consolidating democracy and good governance; and capacity building (UN 2007:7-9). The PBC did not issue guidelines for civil society participation until June 2007, two-thirds of the way into the process to determine the priorities for the Framework adopted only six months later. While the founding resolutions of the PBC and the belatedly released provisional guidelines pay rhetorical tribute to the importance of civil society in peacebuilding, the Commission's planning and running of

meetings in New York in its first year did not meaningfully support participation by civil society actors from Sierra Leone.<sup>8</sup> The lead time for the first two formal CSMs in New York was short, there was no funding for travel, and the inclusion of only one civil society representative could be regarded as tokenistic rather than a meaningful attempt to reflect the views of a diverse constituency (CIC-IPI 2008: 31). At a civil society meeting in Freetown in December 2006, the opinion was expressed that provisions for civil society participation in the PBC appeared to be an afterthought, as illustrated by the lack of funding and pace of progress without consultation.

This experience also highlighted a lack of coordination, if not division, among civil society actors in Sierra Leone, which illustrates the challenges inherent in determining who should represent civil society in PBC meetings. Interviews with Sierra Leoneans in December 2006 in three rural towns support the finding of the CIC-IPI report that civil society engagement tends to be focussed on the capital city and that 'people in remote areas are not at all aware of the PBC and the development of a peacebuilding strategy' (CIC-IPI 2008:31). Ex-combatants in Freetown observed that 'people don't give feedback to the grassroots' and that the PBC needed to 'use a real insider' who was 'ready to network with other groups'.

Despite this unsatisfactory engagement by the PBC itself, international and regional civil society actors were instrumental in raising awareness of the PBC among local actors. In July 2006, at the time of the first informal CSM in New York, the Netherlands-based Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict and the West African Network for

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Peacebuilding supported the first civil society national consultation on the PBC in Freetown. Later in 2006, while the first formal CSM was being held in New York, South Africa's Centre for Conflict Resolution organised a civil society meeting in Cape

Town aiming to support the development of a civil society network in Sierra Leone that would ensure a more coordinated engagement with the CSMs.

Civil society core group meetings in Freetown, attended by representatives of UNIOSIL, the government, non-government organisations and civil society, discussed plans for the second national consultative meeting on the PBC to be held in Freetown from 19 to 20 December. This national consultative meeting brought together some 60 civil society actors, government authorities, UN officials and paramount chiefs. It recommended that the PBC widen civil society engagement in the region, make the process more inclusive and disseminate the outcomes more widely. In January 2007, a national consultation organised by UNIFEM and the Sierra Leone Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs focussed on enhancing women's engagement with the PBC, while a third national consultation organised jointly by the Mano River Women's Peace Network and the Network on Collaborative Peacebuilding-Sierra Leone developed structures and procedures for civil society engagement with the government, the PBC and other stakeholders.

The PBC in New York, meanwhile, continued to give short shrift to civil society representation, making it difficult for a better-organised civil society network in Sierra Leone to have any meaningful input. The provisional guidelines for the participation of civil society in meetings of the PBC released on 4 June 2007 were developed without consultation with civil society organisations (IGP 2007). Despite the strengthened rhetoric recognising the 'important contribution of civil society' and the intention to 'ensure and encourage greater participation of civil society organisations and representatives from the countries under consideration', the provisional guidelines reinforced the intergovernmental



nature of the PBC and imposed strict guidelines on the participation of CSOs. Unrealistic and unworkable restrictions were imposed on the approval process for CSOs before they could participate in CSMs. Instead, CSO representatives were encouraged to participate as part of national delegations (UN PBC 2007b:2). As argued in a letter from international

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civil society organisations to Carolyn McAskie (Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support), civil society representatives in national delegations should be *in addition* to the invited participants selected by civil society (IGP 2007:2). The provisional guidelines for civil society participation in PBC meetings

highlight the tension between viewing civil society as engaging with the PBC (a UN intergovernmental body) directly or only via the national government concerned. The emphasis on national responsibility for including civil society is consistent with the PBC's goal to support good governance, accountability and transparency. It begs the question, however, as to how the PBC can rely on the government to introduce fair and transparent processes for including civil society.

## Conclusion

Given its mandate to 'ensure and encourage greater participation of civil society organisations', the PBC could become a catalyst for strengthening civil society in the face of a government historically deaf to the demands of its constituents for greater accountability. The PBC is well placed to institutionalise civil society interactions with the governments of Sierra Leone and the region, UN agencies, the World Bank and IMF, and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). This is a potentially powerful force for change in the governance and participation sector of peacebuilding, and holds the promise of promoting democracy and accountability in countries where the PBC is able to intervene. These observations qualify a possible criticism of the PBC that working with the government of the day can be seen to place the UN in a one-sided alliance. It is too soon to say whether the potential for change will be realised, and whether the policies of the newly elected Koroma government in Freetown will result in sustainable development that meets the needs of the electorate. Encouraging appropriate participatory and accountability processes are important in promoting this trend in the face of persistent autocratic practices and greed that have long undermined development and peace in Sierra Leone.

The PBC could thus be seen as playing an important role in integrating and coordinating implementation of various peacebuilding strategies in a context that encourages government leadership and civil society participation. For example, as discussed above, implementation of the TRC recommendations was not initially a priority for the Sierra Leone government and the international community, despite strong support from various civil society actors. As a result of the PBC negotiating process in producing the Framework, however, the Sierra Leone government recommitted itself to implementing the recommendations.

The direct engagement of civil society in the PBC process could help break the nexus between corrupt political influences and economic development priorities, thereby encouraging a redistribution of power more conducive to sustainable peacebuilding and development. Building sustainable peace and development requires attention to broad-based economic growth which includes those who have been previously marginalised, politically and economically, and avoids reproducing the power asymmetries that

underpinned the war (Keen 2005). Constructive engagement with power on the local level is therefore needed to complement and counter the power of state-based institutions, which requires 'both an understanding of the culture and history as well as respect for the political aspirations of the population' (Chesterman 2005:345). By engaging with the needs and priorities of disaffected youth and other members of civil society, including ex-combatants, amputees and other victims, the PBC can support Sierra Leone in its quest for sustainable peace and development.

There is, however, concern among civil society actors internationally that the Peacebuilding Commission has so far failed to provide adequately for local civil society participation. An assessment of the performance of the PBC in relation to Sierra Leone suggests that the Commission needs to focus more on redressing power imbalances and priorities to include civil society in addition to state-based actors in decision making as well as in implementation of the Peacebuilding Cooperative Framework. According to Wyeth (2006:3), the sidelining of civil society presents a danger that peacebuilding strategies are based on political compromises among elites. The PBC needs to clarify its aims regarding local participation in determining peacebuilding priorities: making information more readily available to the public; supporting a civil society representative to give presentations at CSMs; providing funding for civil society attendance at meetings in New York; and a greater emphasis on

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in-country briefings and consultations. Unofficially, several members of the PBC delegation field mission to Sierra Leone in March 2007 'commented on how the visit changed their perception of civil society and the value of including NGOs in the consultative process' (Security Council 2007:5); however, this has been slow to translate into meaningful changes in the way PBC interacts with Sierra Leonean civil society.

These recommendations were supported to some extent in the PBC's first annual report released in June 2007. The report indicated that key lessons learned have been: the need for a ground-up, inclusive process with the national government in the lead and involving other key national and international actors; the need to ensure participation in CSMs from the field; and the need for field visits by members of the PBC. As of September 2008, there have been two visits by PBC delegations to Sierra Leone, as well as two visits by the CSM chair, Ambassador Frank Majoor of the Netherlands.

Two other lessons learned relate specifically to the encouragement of civil society participation: the benefits of regular, informal CSMs that support flexibility, open participation and interactive discussion; and the focus on practical outcomes and the unique composition of CSMs, which enables more effective collaboration (UN 2007:12). Yet the PBC's provisional guidelines for civil society participation of June 2007 fail to adequately encourage such open participation and interactive discussion, despite the increase in frequency of informal CSMs.

As noted in the CIC-IPI report, the PBC is not meant to be something that just happens in New York. There is some evidence that the PBC process in Burundi was more inclusive, serving to bring more actors around the table in country-based consultations feeding into the Strategic Framework (CIC-IPI 2008:14). In Sierra Leone, local civil society networks organised meetings attended by UN in-country representatives and government officials which recommended processes to ensure input to the PBC CSMs. However, there is potential for greater collaboration and coordination between UNIOSIL and other UN agencies in Sierra Leone, and with UN Headquarters and the PBC in New York. What is

needed for future PBC engagements is a stronger, formal relationship to be established between the in-country consultations and the New York-based meetings of the PBC where critical decisions are made about peacebuilding priorities and the finalisation of an integrated peacebuilding strategy.

The PBC has the potential to provide an important 'watchdog' function to ensure that the government of Sierra Leone and the international actors involved in peacebuilding respond to the needs and priorities of civil society. Conversely, the PBC can also provide for information and consultation that ensures not only civil society participation, but also local civil society ownership of the Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework that will help to ensure its sustainability and effectiveness in the longer term. Whether such an unwieldy

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body as the PBC, with its wide membership and ambitions for inclusiveness, can effectively fulfil these goals remains to be seen. Evidence from its work in Sierra Leone highlights the challenges but also the significance of the opportunities for the PBC. With the support of international civil society, networking among groups in Sierra Leone has

been catalysed into more cohesive and effective action by the attention provided by the PBC, and important first steps have been taken to ensure a more responsive and accountable governance structure. The PBC thus provides a useful framework through its CSMs and broader consultations, including field visits, for identifying and coordinating activities that contribute to a participatory and sustainable peacebuilding process, and for consolidating lessons learned and improving peacebuilding practice. With strong civil society participation and local ownership of peacebuilding priorities, the sustained attention promised by the PBC could make all the difference to Sierra Leoneans struggling to promote development and rebuild peace in their country.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The UN Peacebuilding Commission was established by matching Security Council and General Assembly resolutions passed in December 2005 (UNSC Resolution 1645 of 20 December 2005 and UNGA Resolution 60/180 of 30 December 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Field research in Sierra Leone was made possible by research and travel grants from the University of Sydney and support from the Sierra Leone Court Monitoring Programme. Research assistance was provided by Saidu Turay in Sierra Leone and Joseph Toman in Sydney.

<sup>3</sup> Interviews were conducted with 30 victims and 30 ex-combatants in the capital, Freetown, Bo in the south, Kenema in the east and Makeni in the north. Local NGOs and civil society groups consulted included the Network Movement for Justice and Development, Campaign for Good Governance, Women in Peacebuilding Network, Forum of Conscience, Coalition for Justice and Accountability, Amputees Association (Kenema), Amputees and War-wounded Association (Freetown), Movement for Restoration of Democracy, Community Women's Development Committee (Bo), Promoters of Peace and Justice (Freetown), Bikers Association (Makeni), Special Court Working Group, Truth and Reconciliation Working Group, and National Vision for Sierra Leone.

<sup>4</sup> This article does not cover the more recent developments in PBC operations and local civil society participation supported by the UN country team, which may be contributing to the implementation of the Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework on the ground.

<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive overview of peacebuilding activities and operations, see Jeong (2005), who divides these activities into four categories: security and demilitarisation, political transition, development, and reconciliation and social rehabilitation.

<sup>6</sup> These comments are directed toward the government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah in power prior to the 2007 elections. According to the International Crisis Group (2008), the elections of August–September 2007 restored legitimacy to the democratic process, with the victory of Ernest Bai Koroma and the All People’s Congress in place of the ruling Sierra Leone People’s Party. Koroma was elected on the basis of his commitment to improve service delivery and stamp out corruption, but as outlined by ICG (2008), the new government faces significant challenges in order to build public confidence and implement its reform agenda.

<sup>7</sup> In January 2006, UNIOSIL replaced the previous peacekeeping mission, UNAMSIL, which was deployed from October 1999 until December 2005. UNIOSIL is seen to have successfully completed its mandate in assisting in returning refugees; disarmament and demobilisation of ex-combatants, including child soldiers; restoring the authority of the government, organising elections and training police; and in supporting the establishment of the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the TRC. UNIOSIL was mandated to help consolidate peace in the country by helping to build capacity in state institutions to provide basic services and realise the Millennium Development Goals; develop an action plan for human rights; support the holding of free, fair and credible elections in 2007; enhance good governance, transparency and accountability in public institutions; strengthen the rule of law; strengthen the security sector; promote a culture of peace, dialogue and participation; and develop initiatives for the protection and well-being of youth, women and children (Security Council Resolution 1620, 31 August 2005).

<sup>8</sup> According to the Security Council Special Research Report on the PBC issued in October 2007, ‘not all PBC members were keen on civil society participating in all of the Commission’s deliberations’ (Security Council Report 2007:7).

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