



**The APC Boycott:
Implications for
Governance and Stability**

**From FC Kallon to
International Dreams:
An Interview with
Rising Star AdamaKargbo**



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**The Right to Protest
in Sierra Leone:**

**A Battle for
FREEDOM
and
DEMOCRACY**

MANY MORE

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Dear readers,

September Spotlights Politics, Protests, and Progress in Sierra Leone



ALIEU TUNKARA

Editor

Welcome to the September edition of Sierraeye Digital Magazine, your trusted source for in-depth coverage of a wide range of topics, from politics, governance, and elections to commerce, the economy, health, and much more.

Sierra Leone has recently emerged from a fiercely contested election, yet the dust of the political battlefield has not yet settled, leaving the nation in a state of uncertainty. The opposition, the All People's Congress (APC), has accused the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) of bias in favour of the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). This accusation has led to a historic boycott of the country's governance system at all levels. For the past three months, APC's parliamentarians, mayors, chairpersons, and councillors have steadfastly refused to take their seats in parliament and councils countrywide, with only two exceptions.

Political analysts note that this boycott marks a significant moment in Sierra Leonean political history, the likes of which have not been seen since the SLPP boycotted the 1973 elections. However, there is a glimmer of hope on the horizon as negotiations are set to begin with the involvement of the Peace Commission, backed by the Commonwealth, African Union, and ECOWAS peace brokers. In this edition, we explore the implications of the APC Boycott for Governance and Stability, scrutinize the flaws in the June 24 Elections, and delve into the topic of Sierra Leone's transition from learned helplessness to learned optimism.

Equally concerning is the opposition's decision not to challenge the election results in court. Mohamed Wurie Bah examines how Judicial Independence can be upheld while addressing opposition concerns in election cases in Sierra Leone.

The struggle for freedom and democracy in Sierra Leone, often expressed through street protests and stay-at-home actions, is also a central focus of this edition. While the nature of these protests is noteworthy, their impact on the economy and state security takes precedence. The Sierra Leone Police, as the principal law enforcement agency, claim to be stretched in terms of capacity and logistics to manage street protests. As permits for street protests are routinely denied, citizens have resorted to staying at home, inadvertently causing substantial economic disruption. This edition explores the right to protest in the context of our pursuit of freedom and democracy.

Building on this theme, public interest lawyer Eleanor Thompson argues that Sierra Leone's democracy needs people power. She emphasizes the crucial role citizens play

in setting a country's democratic standards, highlighting that citizens' questions and demands serve as guideposts for government action at all levels of governance in Sierra Leone.

The newly appointed Regional Director for Africa & The Middle East at the International Fund for Public Interest Media discusses the phenomenon known as 'youthlash.' This term describes the collective response of the youthful population against existing models of democratic governance. He examines how African youth are reshaping the political landscape and what the future holds for them.

In addition to these critical issues, the pervasiveness of disinformation in Sierra Leone's politics takes center stage. Disinformation, as defined by a UNESCO study in 2020, involves spreading false information, often referred to as 'fake news,' to manipulate a gullible public. We explore how social and conventional media are susceptible to disinformation, posing significant challenges for the Independent Media Commission.

Furthermore, economist Franklin Bendu delves into Sierra Leone's Path to Fiscal Discipline, focusing on the importance of the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework in aligning policy, planning, and budgeting to achieve credible government budgets.

This edition also advocates for a coherent and strategic foreign policy for Sierra Leone, examines Franco-African Relations, and scrutinizes military takeovers in West Africa, urging the African Union to consider constitutional coups in its response.

Christiana Kallon Kelly, a Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellow, sheds light on the role of children and youth in national development in Sierra Leone. While young people should not bear the sole responsibility for national development, their involvement in the cabinet presents an opportunity for meaningful engagement and responsiveness to their concerns.

We are also passionate about the Women for Water and Peace Project in Sierra Leone, which focuses on water access and empowerment. Mayanie Yeatie Koroma discusses the struggles and progress in this endeavour.

Lastly, we had the privilege of interviewing Adama Kargbo, the recipient of the Sierra Leone Women's Premier League "Player of the Year Award" for the 2022/2023 season.

We invite you to dive into the insightful articles within this edition as you enjoy your day. Stay informed, stay engaged, and let Sierraeye be your window into the complex and ever-evolving landscape of Sierra Leone.



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The Right to Protest in Sierra Leone: A Battle for **FREEDOM and DEMOCRACY**

Sierra Leone has endured its share of civil unrest and political turmoil over the years. The country's Constitution, framed to protect fundamental human rights and freedoms, including the right to protest, reflects the aspirations of its citizens for a just and equitable society. However, despite these constitutional guarantees and international commitments, exercising the right to protest in Sierra Leone remains a contentious and often denied privilege. As we

write, Magistrate Hadiru Daboh has remanded 43 accused persons at the Pademba Road Correctional Centre for unlawful procession, riotous conduct and disorderly behaviour and refused them bail. The matter comes up again on 21st September 2023.

On countless occasions, citizens have been denied the right to exercise this right. The Sierra Leone Police has a template to constantly refuse requests to protests. When protests occur without permission, they clamp

down on them using heavy force because permission was not obtained.

Sierra Leone's Constitution, enshrined in Section 15, unequivocally affirms the right to protest, proclaiming "freedom of conscience, of expression and assembly and association" as inalienable rights for all citizens. These rights, it asserts, are subject only to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the public interest. The supremacy of the Constitution



public safety, public order, health, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Despite these international commitments and constitutional provisions, Sierra Leone's domestic legal framework contains hurdles to exercising the right to protest. The 1965 Public Order Act is the

primary legislation governing assemblies, and it requires citizens to obtain authorisation from the Inspector General Police to hold a procession with several notable exceptions. However, this authorisation is increasingly denied, and large gatherings and demonstrations have been banned.

Sierra Leone's history is marred by periods of political unrest, and successive governments have often suppressed the right to protest. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's



report following the country's brutal civil war identified a lack of respect for citizens' fundamental rights as one of the key factors contributing to the conflict. Despite constitutional protections, citizens face obstacles when exercising their right to protest.

Activists and rights defenders in Sierra Leone have faced arrests and harassment when challenging the status quo. Women protesting against economic hardship were also arrested in August of the





previous year. These actions demonstrate a continued disregard for citizens' rights and the suppression of dissent.

In light of the ongoing challenges to the right to protest, there are increasing calls for a new constitution in Sierra Leone. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations included the creation of a new constitution that upholds democratic values and protects citizens' rights. However, despite various attempts, the country has not realised this imperative reform.

Sierra Leone's journey towards democracy and respect for human rights has been marked by progress and setbacks. While the Constitution and international commitments recognise the right to protest, citizens face obstacles and repression when exercising this fundamental right. The call for constitutional reform and the elimination of oppressive laws like the Public Order Act are critical steps towards ensuring that Sierra Leoneans can fully enjoy their democratic rights and participate in shaping the future of their nation.

To protect democracy and freedom in Sierra Leone, it is imperative that action be taken. The government should consider repealing the restrictive Public Order Act and introducing new laws facilitating peaceful protests. It is a crucial step towards ensuring that Sierra Leoneans can exercise their democratic rights, participate in shaping their nation's future, and continue the journey towards a brighter tomorrow. The right to protest is not a privilege but a cornerstone of democracy that must be safeguarded for all.



The struggle for the right to protest in Sierra Leone is more than a battle for the individual right to assemble—it is a battle for freedom and democracy. It is a battle that must be won if Sierra Leone is to reach its full potential and stand as a beacon of democratic progress in West Africa.



On its Sickbed... Sierra Leone's Democracy Needs an Injection of People Power

The Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) may have declared winners in Sierra Leone's June 2023 multi-tier elections, but the country's democracy ultimately emerged as the loser in the electoral process.

On 24 June 2023, Sierra Leoneans turned out in large numbers across the country for presidential, parliamentary and local government elections. Even when logistical problems in parts of the country threatened to disenfranchise some voters, in a show of resilience, they remained in line after nightfall, determined to have their voices heard through the ballot box. But that resilience from citizens turned to apathy once election results were announced by the ECSL and President Julius Maada Bio was hastily sworn in for a second term despite looming concerns from domestic and international observers about the opacity of vote tabulation and statistical inconsistencies in the official election results announced by ECSL. With the exception of vitriolic social media posts by the supporters of the two main political parties, there was an

eerie silence from the people, who looked to domestic and international election observers or a seemingly disorganised, rudderless opposition party to speak for them. That same eerie silence was present the day after the Cotton Tree fell exactly one month before the 24 June elections. That once-towering national symbol of freedom was, like citizens, tired of being

resilient and carrying the weight of the country's unhealed trauma and mythical democracy on its back.

Where citizens have handed over their power to others, whether willingly or unwillingly, they are the ultimate losers. Citizen apathy undercuts the critical role that civil society plays in building confidence in



democracy by closely monitoring all phases of elections. Civil society is not just organised groups or institutions like non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or professional associations or trade unions

by ECSL based on the findings of its Process Results and Vote Transparency (PRVT), the citizen group and some of its members were met with intimidation and death threats.

calls for polling station results to be published, the ECSL has failed to clear doubt about vote tabulation and results. Aggrieved parties, namely the All People's Congress, shut the door on challenging the election results through due process in the courts. The government likewise has floundered in shoring up citizens' confidence in its stated commitment to free, fair, transparent and credible elections. Rather, some government officials seem intent on doing linguistic gymnastics to emphasise the peaceful nature of the election while avoiding mention of transparency and credibility, deflecting attention from questions and concerns about electoral irregularities to appointments to Bio's new youthful and more gender-inclusive cabinet, and gaslighting citizens by accusing those who raise concerns about electoral irregularities of inciting instability in the country. What these politicians fail to grasp is that when lingering doubts exist about the electoral process or results, anything that flows from it, including commendable actions, becomes tainted.

While elections serve as a strong indicator of how a State regards the will of the people, elections



that amplify their constituencies' voices, but more importantly, ordinary citizens or communities collectively taking social action. This is why Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) called on Sierra Leonean civil society to "safeguard democracy by highlighting instances of electoral fraud." Unfortunately, when National Election Watch (NEW), the country's largest coalition of citizen election observers, raised questions and concerns about the election results announced

The June 2023 elections and their aftermath were riddled with missed opportunities to signal that electoral democracy is advancing in Sierra Leone. By its unresponsiveness to public



are not the sole determinant of the state of a nation's democratic advancement or regression. Beyond elections, democratic litmus tests include governments' accountability to their people delivered through strong, effective, independent institutions like the election management body and judiciary; the level of civic engagement and inclusion; and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Literally or constructively foreclosing citizens' outlets for channelling grievances, like protests, the right to assemble, the courts, or even the ballot box, is a recipe for violence, as Sierra Leone's history shows.

Citizens keep the heartbeat of democracy alive. One does not have to look far for examples. A civil society effort in Burkina Faso comprising organised labour, opposition groups, and youth movements manifested the wider Burkinabé resolve to derail President Blaise Compaoré's plans in 2014 to amend the constitution and keep himself in office. In Guinea, a youth-led coalition of civil society groups and political parties was not as successful in eventually stopping President Alpha Condé from holding a constitutional referendum in 2020 to remove Presidential term limits. However, citizens' staunch resistance and the international community's vocal concerns succeeded in getting the referendum postponed twice. Last month, Senegalese civil society pressure drove President Macky Sall to

announce that he would not be seeking a third term in office in next year's polls, an otherwise unconstitutional move that Sall, until he lost the game of chicken with Senegalese civil society, was hoping he could execute by force and through dubious legal interpretations.

Make no mistake, Sierra Leone is no Senegal. For decades, Sierra Leone's leaders have banked on the resignation of citizens, overwhelming the people with rhetoric, distractions, division, and violent force to suppress pro-democracy efforts as people struggle to survive one political, social, or economic crisis after another. The TRC noted, for instance, that while dragging the country toward authoritarianism, the Siaka Stevens government "used concerns about internal security as a pretext to stifle the nascent democratic culture" and subjected state institutions to strict political control. Four decades later, Sierra Leoneans are having déjà vu. For instance, shortly after NEW published some of its PRVT findings in the June 2023 elections, the Office of National Security issued a press release alleging that such publication by NEW had the "tendency to provoke undue tension in the country".

Sierra Leone seems to share a playbook with its neighbour, Guinea, in this respect. Condé used violence and intimidation, ethno-regional sentiments, and corruption to suppress, divide, or influence civil society leaders opposing his third-term bid while

pushing propaganda through state-controlled media, resulting in about 42 deaths and voter apathy that made securing the constitutional change a breeze for him. As the flag bearers of democracy, members of Sierra Leonean civil society must demonstrate independence and non-susceptibility to division or influence, disprove their infamous status as being "on the waiting list" to get into government, and have the responsibility, as the TRC aptly pointed out, to "be watchdogs, not lapdogs" of government.

No other actor in a State sets a country's democratic standards more than citizens. Citizens' questions and demands to State institutions during and between elections serve as guideposts for the government on the will of the people and gaps in fulfilling it. This holds true at all levels of governance in Sierra Leone because citizen engagement, and in turn apathy, starts at the local level. So rather than rhetoric and a heavy-handed tightening of the screws of power, if national and local governments in Sierra Leone want to pay more than a lip service



Eleanor Thompson
is a public interest Lawyer



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UNPACKING THE TROUBLING FLAWS IN THE JUNE 24 ELECTIONS



The June 24 elections in Sierra Leone have exposed a concerning array of flaws and irregularities that cast doubt upon the transparency, fairness, and credibility of the electoral process. Key institutions responsible for safeguarding the democratic process have been tainted by partisanship, constitutional manipulation, and questionable practices, undermining the very foundation of a democratic society.

Partisan Influence on Electoral Institutions

The impartiality of electoral institutions is paramount to the integrity of any democratic election. Unfortunately, Sierra Leone's electoral commission and political parties regulation

authority have faced accusations of favoring the ruling party, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). The appointment of individuals with strong partisan affiliations, such as Mohamed Kenewui Konneh, as the head of the electoral commission, raises concerns about their ability to oversee a fair and unbiased process. Konneh's close ties to the SLPP, including being a classmate of the President at Bo School, suggest a lack of independence in his role. Similar concerns were raised about other commissioners, further eroding public confidence in the institutions' neutrality. The head of the political parties regulation authority was also a former deputy Justice Minister in President Bio's administration, casting doubt on its ability to act

as an impartial arbiter.

Constitutional Manipulation for Political Advantage

The interpretation and application of the constitutional provision allowing for proportional representation have raised eyebrows and sparked controversy. Despite the Supreme Court's endorsement, questions linger about the legitimacy of the interpretation. The subsequent enactment of an election law that set an exceedingly high threshold for winning parliamentary seats worked to the advantage of the ruling party, further exacerbating suspicions of manipulation. By restricting the representation of smaller parties and concentrating power within the SLPP, this manipulation



challenges the principle of fair representation and equitable participation in the democratic process.

Doubts Cast by Questionable Census and Voter Registration

The accuracy of voter data is fundamental to the legitimacy of any election. However, Sierra Leone’s mid-term census results and voter registration processes have faced significant criticism, giving rise to doubts about their reliability. Conducting a census so close to an election raised suspicions about the government’s motives and intentions. Discrepancies between census data and voter registration figures have fueled skepticism, undermining the credibility of the entire electoral process. Opposition parties and civil society groups have questioned the accuracy of the census, suggesting potential political motivations behind the numbers.

Media Bias and Impediments to Freedom of Expression

A balanced and unbiased media landscape is essential for fair competition in democratic elections. In Sierra Leone, the dominance of ruling party advertisements, posters, and

media coverage has stifled the opposition’s ability to convey their message to the public. This media bias distorts the level playing field and undermines the democratic principle of equal access to information and a diversity of perspectives. The skewed media environment hampers informed decision-making and compromises the integrity of the electoral process.

Security Apparatus and Judicial Impartiality

Security forces play a crucial role in ensuring the safety and security of elections. However, reports of violence and partiality by security agents against opposition supporters have raised serious concerns. The alleged use of tear gas against opposition rallies, arrests of opposition leaders, and reports

of violence during the campaign have undermined public trust in the security forces’ impartiality. The judiciary’s perceived complicity in detaining opposition supporters and denying them bail has further eroded confidence in the electoral process.

International Community’s Call for Investigation

The international community’s response to the flawed elections underscores the growing concerns about electoral integrity. Observers from various nations and organizations have highlighted inconsistencies, lack of transparency, and potential irregularities in the election results. Calls for independent investigations and cross-verification have been made to restore confidence in the electoral outcome. The discrepancies observed by international observers, including statistical inconsistencies, suggest a need for a comprehensive and transparent review of the electoral process.

Consequences for Democracy and Stability

The deeply flawed elections in Sierra Leone have far-reaching



implications for the nation’s democracy and stability. The rejection of results by the opposition, allegations of election manipulation, and concerns over the electoral process have sowed mistrust and division among citizens. The potential for a constitutional crisis resulting from the opposition’s refusal to participate in governance exacerbates tensions and threatens social cohesion. The erosion of citizens’ trust in the democratic process and the resurgence of sentiments reminiscent of the civil war era

pose significant risks to Sierra Leone’s future stability and progress.

In light of these serious flaws and irregularities, urgent corrective action is imperative to restore faith in Sierra Leone’s democratic institutions, uphold the principles of fairness and transparency, and ensure that the will of the people is accurately and justly represented in the electoral outcomes.

Unraveling the Flawed June 24 Elections in Sierra Leone: A Precarious Democracy at

Stake

The June 24 elections in Sierra Leone were marred by serious flaws and irregularities, raising concerns about their transparency and credibility. The key institutions responsible for overseeing the elections, such as the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) and the Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC) exhibited partisanship rather than independence. The constitution was interpreted to allow for proportional representation and an election law was promulgated



that set a high threshold, giving the ruling party an unfair advantage.

Questionable census results and flawed voter registration processes further exacerbated doubts about the electoral process. The media, security apparatus, and judiciary appeared biased, undermining the credibility of the elections with serious consequences for Sierra Leone's democracy and the urgent need for corrective action.

Partisan Management of Electoral Institutions

The credibility of any democratic election hinges on the impartiality of electoral institutions. In Sierra Leone, however, the ECSL and the PPRC were criticized for their partisan affiliations. The composition of the electoral commission raised questions about its ability to ensure a fair process. The head of the commission, Mohamed Kenewui Koneh, was associated with the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), fueling doubts about his neutrality. It was alleged that he was a class mate of the President at Bo School and was a card carrying member of the SLPP. The President had first recalled him from his job at the African Development Bank to serve as the Head of the Financial Intelligence Unit, indicating his close association with him. Similar allegations were made against other commissioners of the electoral commission. The PPRC head was also a former Bio appointee – he was his deputy Justice minister. Laws which required those in charge of these institutions to

be independent were blatantly ignored.

Constitutional Manipulation

The interpretation of section 38A of the constitution allowing for proportional representation was questionable despite the Supreme Court's ratification of the same. To add insult to injury, the public were misled into believing that the main advantage of proportional representation would be to allow smaller parties to enter parliament. The opposite occurred. An election law as passed which set the threshold to win a seat in parliament so high that only two parties ended up in parliament. This benefited the ruling party immensely. They almost obtained the desired goal – 2/3rd majority. This skewed interpretation of the law tilted the playing field in favour of the incumbent government, effectively restricting the smaller parties chances of obtaining seats in parliament. The imposition of such a high threshold, while legally permissible, challenged the principle of fair representation and democratic inclusivity.

Questionable Census and Voter Registration

The foundation of any election lies in accurate voter data. However, Sierra Leone's mid-term census results faced significant criticism and skepticism. The government's decision to conduct a census so close to an election was unprecedented and raised concerns about its political motivations. Opposition parties and civil society groups questioned the accuracy of the

census, pointing to discrepancies between census data and voter registration figures. These doubts cast a shadow over the entire electoral process.

Media Bias and Freedom of Expression

A healthy democracy depends on a free and fair media environment that provides equal coverage to all political parties. In Sierra Leone, access to media was predominantly granted to the ruling party, limiting the opposition's ability to convey their messages to the public. The dominance of ruling party posters and advertisements further hindered the opposition's visibility. This unequal media landscape tilted the electoral playing field and undermined the principle of fair competition.

Security Apparatus and Judicial Independence

Security forces should ensure a safe and secure environment for voters and candidates. However, in Sierra Leone, reports of violence and brutality by security agents against opposition supporters raised concerns about their impartiality. Tear gas was used against opposition rallies, and arrests were made, raising questions about the security forces' role in a democratic election. On election day, violence was seen at a small number of polling stations. During the campaign, APC supporters complained of attacks in the south and east regions, where SLPP backing is strongest, while SLLP members also reported violence by opposition followers. The

death or some would say the summary execution of Hawa Dumbuya, 64, a nurse and party volunteer, was shot in the head at the offices of the All People’s Congress (APC) in the capital Freetown after police officers and the presidential guard surrounded the building during a post-election press conference on Sunday. Samura Kamara, the APC’s presidential candidate who was seen as the main contender to unseat Bio, wrote on Twitter: “I have been barricaded in my APC party headquarters during my live press conference. Live bullets and teargas fired at my offices by government forces. “People laying on the floor and the military has surrounded the building. Live bullets fired at my private office at the Party headquarters. This is an assassination attempt.” The judiciary’s alleged complicity further eroded public trust in the electoral process. It was always read to detain and deny bail to opposition supporters charged to court.

International Community’s Response

The international community’s reaction to the flawed elections

reflected growing concerns about electoral integrity. Observers

from various nations and organizations highlighted statistical inconsistencies, lack of transparency, and potential irregularities in the election results. The United States and European Union expressed reservations about the process and called for independent investigations to restore confidence in the electoral outcome. While observers from the African Union and regional body the Economic Community of West African States declared the elections free and fair, others expressed some concerns. European Union observers pointed to ‘statistical inconsistencies’ in the presidential election results. These include very high turnout in some districts and a very low number of invalid votes. In addition, seals were reportedly broken on some ballot boxes before votes were counted. Logistical shortcomings, including the fact that with some polling stations opened late, may have left people unable to vote in some areas. The Carter Center called for the results

from any ballot boxes that were opened in violation of procedure and international best practice should be set aside for additional scrutiny and should not be included in the final results until a formal, transparent, and inclusive review can establish whether they can be considered credible. The ECSL should publish detailed results at the polling station level to allow for cross-verification in accordance with international best practice.

Consequences for Democracy and Stability

The flawed elections have profound implications for Sierra Leone’s democracy and stability. The opposition’s rejection of the results and allegations of election manipulation have fueled mistrust and resentment among citizens. The potential for a constitutional crisis due to the opposition’s boycott of governance exacerbates divisions and threatens the country’s social cohesion. The erosion of citizens’ trust in the democratic process risks reviving sentiments reminiscent of the civil war era.

Conclusion

The flawed June 24 elections in Sierra Leone have exposed critical weaknesses in the country’s democratic institutions and processes. Partisan management of electoral bodies, constitutional manipulation, questionable census results, media bias, security concerns, and the international community’s skepticism have cast a shadow over the electoral outcome. Sierra Leone’s democracy is at a crossroads, and urgent corrective action is necessary to restore citizens’ trust, ensure fair representation, and prevent further instability. The international community must continue to monitor the situation and support efforts to address the flaws that have jeopardized the integrity of the democratic process.

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The APC Boycott: Implications for Governance and Stability

Disruptive Absence in Parliament Raises Concerns

Following the June 24, 2023 elections, 82 out of 135 parliamentarians took their oaths of office, launching their legislative, representative, and oversight responsibilities. However, from the colourful swearing-in ceremony, the most glaring absence was the All Peoples Congress (APC) members, except for Honourable Mohamed Bangura. A subsequent appearance by APC parliamentarian Alfred Ayodele Thompson was met with disciplinary actions. This boycott has extended to APC mayors, chairpersons, and councillors who have failed to take their oaths at councils.

This boycott is the opposition's response to their contention that the June polls were "rigged." Their stance was articulated in a July 5, 2023, press release, in which they unequivocally endorsed not participating in the sixth Sierra Leonean parliament. The absence of APC members during President Julius Maada Bio's inaugural address in mid-July underscored their protest. The opposition's refusal to recognize Bio's presidency and



their absence from parliament has deep-reaching implications for governance, stability, and international relations.

Cascading Consequences of the Stalemate on Governance and Democratic Resilience

The conspicuous void left by the absence of APC parliamentarians casts a long shadow over Sierra Leone's governance landscape, threatening the very core of its democratic principles. As the echo chambers of the opposition fall silent within the hallowed halls of parliament, a chain reaction of challenges ensues, culminating in a potentially perilous situation where democratic resilience hangs in the balance.

At the heart of democratic governance lies the dynamic

interplay of differing perspectives which fosters robust debates and holistic policy-making. The lack of an opposition voice creates a void in these crucial discussions, stifling the clash of ideas that often births innovative solutions. Without the counterbalance provided by opposition parliamentarians, the discourse becomes monochromatic, resulting in policies that might fail to address the multifaceted needs of the nation.

Furthermore, the absence of a strong opposition compromises the art of compromise itself. Negotiation and consensus-building is an art form that thrives on diversity of thought and perspective. In its absence, the legislative process becomes susceptible to skewed decision-

making, potentially leading to policies that inadequately reflect the nuanced needs of the populace. The intricate balance between differing viewpoints, a hallmark of a well-functioning democracy, is compromised, allowing for unchecked policy formulations.

Yet, the most profound ramification of this stalemate lies in the perilous realm of democratic backsliding. A robust opposition acts as a bulwark against the erosion of democratic values, ensuring that

In this intricate tapestry of governance, every thread has significance. The absence of APC parliamentarians not only weakens the democratic fabric but also leaves gaping holes that affect the very essence of representation, accountability, and transparency. The ramifications extend beyond the immediate legislative vacuum, trickling down to citizens who depend on elected officials to champion their interests.

Restoring the opposition's presence in parliament is

environment where citizens' voices are heard, policies are comprehensive, and the nation's democratic legacy remains resolute.

External Perception and Funding

The far-reaching ramifications of this political impasse have extended beyond Sierra Leone's borders, casting a shadow on the nation's democratic standing. The echoes of this standoff have reverberated internationally, leaving a dent in the once-



the institutions built to safeguard the rights and freedoms of citizens remain steadfast. With the opposition's voice muted, the potential for the gradual erosion of these foundations increases. The checks and balances that prevent the concentration of power and the erosion of civil liberties are put at risk, exposing the nation to the perils of creeping authoritarianism.

paramount, not only to resurrect the spirit of democratic discourse but also to rekindle the fires of compromise and to fortify the defences against democratic decay. Only through the diverse interplay of ideas, the robust exchange of opinions, and the diligent safeguarding of democratic values can Sierra Leone's governance truly flourish, fostering an

shining armour of Sierra Leone's democratic image. The ripple effects have breached national boundaries, prompting global concern over the state of the nation's governance and political stability.

Prominent global players, including the European Union, United Nations, United States, United Kingdom, and an array of



international bodies, have held their support in abeyance due to the persistent post-election impasse. The consequences have been far-reaching and multifaceted. The withholding of crucial financial support, which has historically served as a lifeline for addressing budgetary shortfalls, rectifying trade imbalances, and driving sustainable economic growth, now stands suspended, yielding detrimental repercussions for Sierra Leone's social services, economic advancement, and overall development trajectory.

The predicament at hand has catapulted Sierra Leone onto a rather unwelcome global stage, serving as an alarming case study for the perils of political deadlock and its cascading effects on constitutional governance. The nation's reputation, once adorned with aspirations of democratic progress, has been tarnished by the spectacle of its political stalemate. Sierra Leone's status as a beacon of democratic promise now hangs

in the balance, undermined by the inability to navigate a critical crossroads in the nation's political journey.

The very essence of this predicament has propelled Sierra Leone into the spotlight as an inadvertent poster child for the complexities of constitutional crises. The juxtaposition of an array of democratic values in jeopardy and the suspension of critical funding channels has created a disconcerting narrative, one that resonates with global audiences as a cautionary tale about the fragility of democratic institutions.

In a world that observes, analyzes, and responds to political events with heightened vigilance, Sierra Leone's predicament underscores the intricate interplay between domestic politics and international perceptions. The nation stands at a crossroads, where the restoration of political functionality is not only essential for domestic harmony but also

pivotal for reclaiming its position on the global stage. As the world watches and waits, Sierra Leone has a compelling opportunity to reshape its narrative, revitalizing its democratic identity and reclaiming the trust of its global partners.

Critical Oversight and Accountability

A functional parliament serves as a watchdog over the executive branch, preventing abuses of power and ensuring that public resources are judiciously allocated. The presence of opposition parliamentarians is pivotal in scrutinizing government actions, policy implementations, and budget allocations. Their absence creates a chasm in the oversight mechanism, weakening the foundation of accountability and endangering the principles of responsible governance. The vacuum left by their non-participation enables unmonitored decisions and unchecked use of public funds, undermining the trust citizens place in their elected

representatives.

Comprehensive Representation for Diverse Needs

The representation of diverse voices is a cornerstone of democratic governance. Opposition parliamentarians serve as conduits for the concerns, aspirations, and needs of constituencies that may not align with the ruling party's agenda. Their absence denies citizens a comprehensive representation that ensures policies cater to the full spectrum of societal needs. This lack of diversity risks sidelining important issues, inhibiting inclusivity, and impeding equitable development.

Fragile National Stability Amid Escalating Friction

The escalating tensions between the ruling party and the opposition have birthed grave security concerns. As political animosity intensifies, the potential for violence and unrest increases, undermining national stability. The mounting friction

has already manifested in sporadic outbreaks of violence, casting a pall over the country's peace and security. This climate of unease threatens to unravel the progress achieved since Sierra Leone emerged from a period of conflict.

Investor Confidence in Peril

A stable political environment is a prerequisite for attracting foreign investment. The current atmosphere of uncertainty and tension can potentially deter prospective investors who seek stability, predictability, and a conducive business climate. The nation's economic growth and job creation aspirations are intricately tied to its capacity to foster a secure and stable environment. The escalating political discord has placed a question mark on Sierra Leone's reputation as a destination for foreign investment, risking the economic prosperity of the nation.

A pressing call for swift resolution lies in the confluence of these multifaceted challenges.

Reestablishing a functional parliament with robust oversight, diverse representation, and diminished security threats is not merely a political imperative but a national necessity. The nation's democratic resilience, economic progress, and social harmony depend on the collective determination to transcend divisive rhetoric and work towards a unified vision of a prosperous and stable Sierra Leone.

The Path Forward

To mitigate these challenges, a reconciliation between the opposing parties is imperative. The international community's hesitance to recognize Sierra Leone's political configuration underscores the urgency of finding common ground. APC's return to parliamentary duties is vital for governance, transparency, and political stability. Failure to resolve this impasse endangers the nation's democratic progress, economic growth, and international relationships.



In the interest of the nation and its citizens, it is incumbent upon the leadership of both parties to rise above partisan differences, prioritize the nation's well-being, and restore parliamentary functionality. Sierra Leone's future hinges on the ability of its leaders to transcend political divides and uphold the principles of democratic governance.



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Tackle the roots, not symptoms

Is it too soon to talk about the elections? But this isn't about the two parties that have dominated Sierra Leone's political landscape since before independence 60+ years ago or about the strongmen at the helm of these parties and their machinations to grab, hold onto,

many profound phenomena we can't quite fathom. And many people worldwide believe in a Divine Order best not interfered with by us mere mortals.

Where dogs lead, humans follow

But, we have somehow navigated ourselves to a position where fatalism is our preferred

(Re)think, talk, do

There are three things we all need to do to not only learn optimism but to go on and take our destiny into our own hands and own the 21st century. We need to rethink, talk, and do.

First, we must embrace what mindfulness practitioners call a "beginner's mind." If in the early

Sierra Leone:

Shifting from Learned Helplessness to Learned Optimism

and extend their grip on this benighted nation.

We should see the elections as a symptom of a deeper societal malaise. Political party conventions mirror national plebiscites in bribery, violence, malpractice, and controversy. We should spend more time tackling underlying causes.

Forget about the politicians for a moment. Let's talk about the rest of us. We're in a state of "learned helplessness". Our morale is low not because we can't see the seriousness of our predicament but because we believe there's nothing we can do about it. "Ow for do, God dey." "Mek dem try normor." "We lef all ting to God."

Piety has its place. There are

response to our plight.

In her book *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, the psychologist Angela Duckworth tells the story of how two eminent psychologists, Marty Seligman and Steve Maier demonstrated through experiments how dogs can learn helplessness or be conditioned to act in ways to overcome stressful and painful situations through their evasive actions, in other words, learn optimism.

If we're to move forward as a nation, we Sierra Leoneans, like those dogs in the experiment, will have to learn how to adopt behaviors to overcome our apparent learned helplessness. Yes, we can learn to be optimistic. Indeed, hope is a discipline. It's not just a feeling.

1960s at least one economist could predict that Sierra Leone had better developmental prospects than Singapore, no one can deny we've earned the right to be a little disappointed in how things have panned out for us in Sierra Leone. Coups, war, kleptocracy, juntas, mediocrity, nepotism, tribalism, neopatrimonial bigmanism, imperial presidency, bad governance, violence, rigging, cheating, lying, and that's just the first ten years! What terms haven't political scientists, anthropologists, economists, sociologists among others used to describe the curious phenomenon of Sierra Leone? So, yes, the "Athens of West Africa" has messed up. Bigly.

But, our history isn't our destiny. Our continued slide

down a slithery slope to ignominy isn't inevitable. We've just experienced a divisive, violent election that has left us bruised, battered, divided, and demoralized. So, what next? "Mek dem try dey?" Do we fold our hands and step back? Do we allow our cynicism to generate a self-fulfilling prophecy? Can we embrace a "what if?" mindset?

Dialogue to bridge the divides

Second, after imagining a new beginning and hopeful possibilities, we must talk to each other across our different divides. Our divisions are a legacy of our history. We get along ok together until politics intrudes. Step outside our political divide, and we see we have far more in common when you factor in shared interests. How many of us don't want harmony, progress, prosperity, peace, jobs, dignity, health, respect, hope? What does our politics have to say about these shared aspirations? Way too little. And worryingly, the space

for political discourse seems to be narrowing rather than widening as it should.

Social media often helps to accentuate our apparent divisions and narrow the space. Yet, deeply embedded in most of our cultures and traditions is the concept of the palaver hut, where we air our differences, seek to understand different perspectives, and work hard to forge a shared understanding and way forward. Yes, Sierra Leone needs dialogue.

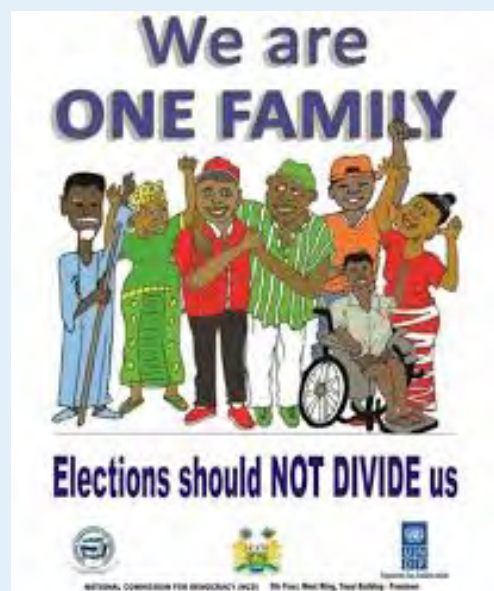
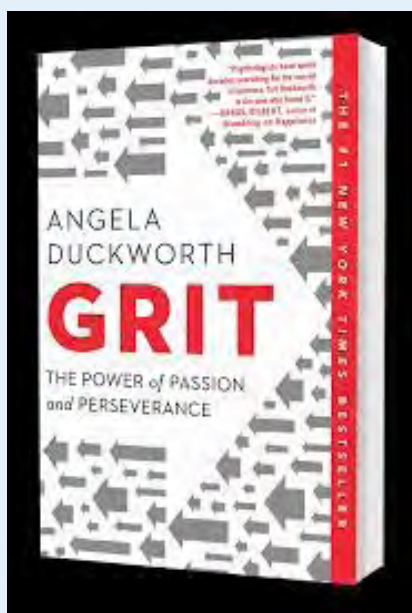
Common interests, real differences

No, it isn't easy. It isn't a panacea. We may have common interests, but there are fundamental differences we need to work through. Some of these are patrimonial political differences. Because we divide ourselves, we argue and fight about whose turn it is to chop. In the process, we've reduced ourselves to fighting over a diminishing cake. Sometimes we fight over the crumbs from

this shrinking cake. We miss the more significant questions: What kind of cake do we want? How can we grow this cake in ways that work for all of us?

In his book, *Gambling on Development: Why Some Countries Win and Others Lose*, the economist Stefan Dercon (now an Oxford Professor but not that long ago the Chief Economist of DFID as it was then called) makes a convincing case that countries that have managed to shift from elite bargains to development bargains are the ones growing the cake and offering brighter prospects to more of their citizens.

Are we ready in Sierra Leone for a development bargain? Let's talk. The elite Dercon refers to isn't limited to the political elite. Elites exist in all walks of life and occupy different, sometimes surprising, spaces. Let's think beyond the "usual suspects" to dialogue about who can improve Sierra Leone.



Small wins

So, we've had a rethink, we've talked, so now, third, we need to do. We need to "fake it till we make it". 60+ years on, we're not Singapore. We're not on the road to becoming Singapore. In any case, our vision shouldn't be Singapore but the very best version of Sierra Leone we can imagine and bring into being.

And the way to do this is to embrace the concept of "small wins". Make no mistake: our problems in Sierra Leone are deep, complex, and systemic. People who study such issues describe them as "wicked problems". They're wicked because even the experts rarely

agree on the nature of the problem, let alone the solution.

Take the question of kush, for instance. Bring five experts around the table. You might hear it's a law-and-order problem. Or it's a symptom of profound youth disenfranchisement and alienation. Or it's deeply mired in our complex political economy. Or it's illustrative of a social breakdown in mores and values. Or blame globalization.

Each departure point lends itself to different approaches. Where do we start?

Some legitimacy is conferred through the ballot box, but more legitimacy comes through effective delivery. How can we

not just hold this government to account for delivery but also lean in and support it? How can we suspend disbelief and fake it till we make it?

Again, "way for do?" isn't a strategy. It's not an acceptable response to our plight. Often, at best, when seeking solutions, we'll only have a hypothesis to test rather than a defined solution and strategy. Rather than embracing "paralysis by analysis," we can try a solution and see if it generates a "small win." If it does, and we can make enough sense of the data and insight we develop, we can surmise ways forward from that starting point.

What impedes the way is the way

Imagine spending more time on social media telling stories about small wins and less time on trivia.

Marcus Aurelius, the last of the Five Good Emperors of Rome, wrote: "The mind adapts and converts to its own purposes the obstacle to our acting. The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way."

Timeless words of wisdom. A messy election with a problematic aftermath, deep divisions, and an impasse doesn't impede the way. It is the way. Let's lean into our problems, think again, keep talking, keep doing, keep learning. This is the way.

Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie writing in his personal capacity



Media Watch:

THE PERVASION OF DISINFORMATION IN SIERRA LEONEAN POLITICS

Informed Choices Hampered by Misinformation

Contemporary societies require accurate and credible information to navigate national issues and development effectively. While boasting media institutions that ostensibly strive to keep the populace informed about social, economic, legal, and political matters, Sierra Leone faces the troubling rise of disinformation in its political landscape. By adhering to this obligation, the media should uphold the people’s ‘right to know.’ Sierra Leone’s robust press freedom, enshrined within its laws, including the 1991 Constitution, has been further reinforced by the Right to Access Information Act of 2013 and the repeal of criminal defamation and seditious libel laws in July 2020, fortifying the nation’s cherished media freedom.

Despite these legislative strides, certain elements in the media have begun to perpetuate disinformation, especially regarding politics, capitalizing on the public’s keen interest in political news. Traditional media outlets have long regarded themselves as purveyors of information. Yet, the emergence of ‘Yellow Press’

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and ‘sensational journalism,’ characterized by the “Attack Collect and Defence Collect” approach, has ushered in an era of disinformation within Sierra Leone’s political discourse. UNESCO’s Handbook for Journalism and Training in 2020 defines disinformation as “a deliberate attempt to confuse or manipulate people by delivering dishonest information.”

While disinformation and misinformation involve spreading false information, the former is more nefarious as it seeks to manipulate and deceive. The term ‘disinformation’ first appeared in print media in 1887 and has since gained traction within Sierra Leone’s media, with

sensational and occasionally deceptive headlines dominating the front pages of online newspapers and magazines. Headlines such as “Corruption at State House,” “Impending Losses in Government Revenue,” “Inflation’s Threat to the Economy,” and “International Community’s Cold Shoulder to Government” inundate readers daily.

Deceptive political reporting often takes centre stage





during election periods, where journalists tend to misrepresent electoral processes to align with specific political biases. By sensationalizing news stories with details of police and military brutality, journalists manipulate public sentiment, capitalizing on anxieties, emotions, and instinctual reactions. Headlines like “Police Deploy Tear Gas Against Voters,” “Assassination Attempt on Presidential Candidate,” and “Election Rigging Allegations in Sierra Leone” become regular occurrences.

Publications carrying such headlines often become bestsellers, perpetuating the maxim “leads when it bleeds” as journalists recognize the public’s penchant for negative news over positive content. This phenomenon corresponds with the psychological tendency for audiences to seek information that aligns with their existing beliefs and interests. Notably, such headlines find a receptive audience in the

North-West regions, where the main opposition, All People’s Congress (APC) is very strong. Similarly, newspapers with affiliations to the ruling Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) adopt defensive headlines to counter disinformation, catering to their strongholds in Freetown and the South-East.

In the age of information revolution characterized by ICTs and digitalization, the risk of being overwhelmed by disinformation is ever-present. Social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and TikTok have become notorious breeding grounds for fake news and disinformation, often well-organized and technologically augmented. Bloggers and traditional journalists alike exploit these platforms to deceive viewers through misleading audio, video, and photo content, often portraying politicians, especially those in power, in a negative light.

This onslaught of disinformation

extends to electronic media, characterized by carefully curated sound bites that further perpetuate political biases. Radio and TV stations with affiliations to political parties frequently host interviews where soft, flattering questions are directed towards party allies, while hard questions are reserved for opponents. In this era of heightened connectivity, the risk of being ensnared in disinformation’s cacophony is particularly pronounced.

As the media landscape becomes increasingly polarized, a ‘press war’ unfolds, leaving the audience disadvantaged. In this environment, viewers and listeners are denied accurate information about politics, undermining their ability to make informed choices. Disinformation takes advantage of media illiteracy and the partisan leanings of recipients, enlisting them as unwitting disseminators of manipulated content.

The intertwined relationship between journalism and

politics becomes problematic when disinformation seeps in. Journalists, who should act as watchdogs, instead engage in the “Attack and Defence Collect” approach, prioritizing their political biases over the public interest. The traditional gate-keeping theory which filters information before it becomes news, falters as monetary incentives often overshadow editorial rigour.

While politics and journalism share a symbiotic relationship, this interdependence is most fruitful when untainted by disinformation. The media is responsible for promoting truth and impartiality, upholding



its role as the fourth estate in the democratic process. As Sierra Leone grapples with the corrosive effects of disinformation, its media's

ultimate responsibility remains to serve the public interest and safeguard the nation's democratic ideals.

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Sierra Leone's Path to Fiscal Discipline:

The Power of the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework

Since the end of the civil conflict in 2002, Sierra Leone has been preparing and implementing its national development plan that lays out the country's strategic priorities and key objectives over five years. This exercise is almost always done independently of the annual budget process and the consequence has been the preparation of a wish list of programmes and activities which cannot be realistically achieved given the fiscal space of the Government. The failure to link policy, planning and budgeting is the most important cause of poor budget outcomes in developing countries. To be an effective instrument of financial management, the government budget must be credible.

In recent years, the implementation of a credible budget has been challenging due to the consistent discrepancies between approved and actual

expenditures. The plan to reduce the variance between the approved budget and actual will always be challenging if expenditure cannot be better managed during budget execution. When actual budget outcomes significantly vary from the original budget, it brings considerable challenges to budget execution, often with negative consequences for some Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and their activities.

Since 2001, the Government of Sierra Leone has adopted the Medium Term Expenditure Framework as an effective and efficient system of budgeting that ensures optimum allocation of resources. A Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) is a budgeting tool developed for achieving the best social and economic outcomes from available government resources. While the term MTEF implies a focus on expenditure,

the process emphasises improving the planning of all types of revenues and financing decisions. It links government's development strategy, medium-term three-year rolling budget with political connection rather than the state. Therefore, viding financial resources to politics even during the mid-term and annual State budget.

Although progress has been made in defining spending objectives and attaching costs to activities, a comprehensive MTEF has remained elusive. The budget preparation process has become a box-ticking exercise. This is because, for most years, MDAs and Local Councils only get a fraction of their approved budget. Consequently, MDAs will only make minor adjustments to the previous year's budget, taking on board the guidelines in the Budget Call Circular. Recent Public Expenditure and Financial Accountable (PEFA) reports have highlighted the

poor performance of budgetary outturns.

The Public Financial Management (PFM) Act, 2016 provides the institutional arrangements for implementing the MTEF effectively. Section 22 of the PFM Act 2022 requires the Minister of Finance to prepare macroeconomic and fiscal forecasts which should contain the fiscal policy objectives and a set of integrated medium-term macroeconomic and fiscal targets and projections. Furthermore, Section 56 of the PDM Act 2016 also mandates

the Minister of Finance to request Heads of MDAs to submit for approval monthly forecasts under the approved budget in the Appropriation Act monthly forecasts for the period of time as specified by the Minister.

Recent fiscal policy pronouncements from the Ministry of Finance have emphasised the need to strengthen public expenditure management to create the fiscal space needed for spending on priority areas. The Medium Term National Development Plan (2019-2023) ends this year

and the next strategy (2024-2029) should be anchored on the President's five key pillars. Accordingly, the medium-term budget for 2024-2026 should be based on the objectives in these five pillars. Over the years, despite the issuance of budget ceilings, MDAs have tended to prepare budget estimates in excess of their ceilings. On the other hand, budget predictability has been poor as allocations are not released on time. This undermines planning and makes it challenging for MDAs to execute their activities.

To counter these challenges:

- The Macro Fiscal Working Group should provide a realistic medium-term forecast of the resource envelope, considering domestic and external factors. The resource envelopment must be used to set credible ceilings for MDAs.

- The Ministry of Finance should endeavour to introduce some level of predictability in releasing allocations which should be guided by the monthly forecasts from MDAs. Improving predictability in the release of allocations will enhance budget credibility and instil confidence in the execution of the budget.

- MDAs and local councils should be trained to prepare properly costed and feasible medium-term sectoral expenditures linked to the national strategy.

- MDAs and Local Councils

should have quarterly budget execution reports that will detail progress made in implementing activities in the approved budget and for which allocations have been disbursed.

- MDAs and Local Councils should submit a comprehensive half-yearly report to the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Local Government and Parliament before the budget policy hearings are held. This report should highlight the success and challenges in the execution of the approved budget. It will also give Parliament an opportunity to assess how the approved budget is being implemented. Furthermore, time should be created for performance discussions to understand the challenges in executing the budget.

- Allocate resources to the National Monitoring and

Evaluation Directorate to conduct monitoring exercises on activities implemented by MDAs and Local Councils during the year. The monitoring reports should be discussed at cabinet level to track progress but also address challenges in the execution of the budget.

- The Ministry of Finance should explore the possibility of an inter-ministerial budget for activities that cut across various ministries.



Franklin Sisabu Bendu
is an Economist.

Toward a Coherent and Strategic Foreign Policy for Sierra Leone

Foreign policy is the cornerstone of a nation's engagement with the international community.

It shapes a country's interactions with other nations, influences global perceptions, and ultimately serves the interests of its citizens. In the case of Sierra Leone, a nation that has weathered numerous challenges since gaining independence in 1961, the need for a more coherent and strategic foreign policy stance has become increasingly evident.

Foreign policy encompasses the process of managing a nation's relationships with sovereign states and international actors. It is a dynamic and multifaceted arena where governments seek to safeguard their interests, promote economic growth, and ensure security through diplomacy, negotiation, and collaboration. For Sierra Leone, a country grappling with complex domestic challenges, an effective foreign policy is not just a luxury but a necessity.

Over the years, Sierra Leone has been an active participant in international diplomacy. Its role has evolved from addressing Cold War dynamics to confronting contemporary challenges such as international terrorism, drug trafficking, migration, money laundering, and climate change. These global issues demand

cooperation and collaboration among nations, making foreign relations a critical tool for addressing shared challenges.

Sierra Leone's foreign policy cannot be isolated from its domestic priorities. As one of the world's least developed countries, the nation faces pressing issues related to education, healthcare, infrastructure, and basic services. To surmount these challenges, Sierra Leone requires assistance, support, and cooperation from more developed countries and international institutions.

Sierra Leone's foreign policy should be an extension of its domestic agenda and development goals. While remaining committed to global agendas, it should prioritize international relationships and partnerships that directly contribute to the country's growth. This approach is particularly relevant to Sierra Leone, a country that seeks to strengthen economic ties with African nations, capitalizing on initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area and regional integration within ECOWAS.

The world is rapidly changing due to technological advancements such as Artificial Intelligence, 3D printing, and the transformative impact of the internet. Sierra



Leone must leverage these opportunities through effective diplomacy and foreign relations. This includes promoting trade, investment, and technology transfer to enhance its developmental efforts.

Sierra Leone's foreign policy has historically followed a pragmatic non-alignment approach. However, to meet the evolving challenges of the 21st century, it is essential to have a more focused and coherent foreign policy, while guided by pragmatic non-alignment, has faced challenges and controversies, as evidenced by recent decisions regarding the embassy in Israel. Such instances can lead to confusion and inconsistency in the nation's



foreign relations.

To address these challenges and provide clear guidance, Sierra Leone should develop a comprehensive and single-source foreign policy document. Such a document would serve as a reference point for heads of diplomatic missions, career foreign service officers, and other envoys of the State. This policy framework can help achieve several crucial objectives. First there must be policy coherence. A single-source document would promote coherence in Sierra Leone's foreign relations. It would provide clear instructions, principles, and guidelines for diplomats, ensuring that the nation's positions and actions align with its strategic interests.

Second, by detailing historical foundations, critical elements, and recent developments of international partnerships, this document can help mitigate the risk of jeopardizing strategic partnerships due to a lack of information or misunderstandings. Third, Sierra Leone's foreign policy should emphasize economic diplomacy, with a focus on trade, investment promotion, and technology transfer. This approach can



help drive economic growth and development. We should emphasize the importance of building the capacity of Sierra Leone's foreign service to engage effectively in economic diplomacy at bilateral, multilateral, and non-state levels.

Fourth, we should prioritize the protection of Sierra Leone's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national stability. Additionally, it should promote international cooperation for peace, security, and mutual respect among nations while respecting international law and treaty obligations.

In addition, our foreign policy should guide effort to maintain a favourable international image of Sierra Leone, attracting investors, donors, and tourists to

support its development goals. It should include measures to protect and assist its citizens living abroad, including students, businessmen, and aid workers and should enable Sierra Leone to conduct its relations with foreign states, international organizations, and non-state actors in ways that expand its influence in sub-regional, regional, and global affairs.

The development and implementation of a coherent and strategic foreign policy are essential for Sierra Leone to navigate the complex challenges of the modern world effectively. This policy should be grounded in the nation's economic development goals, promote international cooperation, and provide clear guidance to its diplomats. With a well-defined foreign policy, Sierra Leone can position itself as a reliable partner for global peace, security, and development, harnessing the opportunities of the 21st century while addressing its pressing domestic needs. Sierra Leone's journey toward a clearer and more coherent foreign policy is a vital step in achieving its national interests and development goals on the international stage.



Unraveling Franco-African Relations:

DYNAMICS, REPERCUSSIONS AND PROSPECTS

At the crossroads of history, politics, and economics lies the complex relationship between France and its former African colonies. This essay delves into the nuanced landscape of this relationship, shedding light on recent events that have accentuated its multifaceted nature. The coup d'état in Niger and the subsequent French response serves as a catalyst for deeper analysis, stirring conversations about France's strategic interests in its former colonies.

In recent times, the Republic of Guinea has been thrust into the global spotlight, shedding light on a complex issue that has persisted for decades: the relationship between France and its former African colonies. While it is tempting to lay the blame solely on one side, a more nuanced analysis reveals that the dynamics at play are multifaceted and deeply rooted in history, politics, and economics. The recent coup d'état in Niger and the French response to it have intensified the discussion about France's strategic interests in its former

colonies.

The significance of these discussions reverberates far beyond the immediate circumstances. As tensions between France and Mali, as well as Burkina Faso, worsen, a perplexing agony threatens to extend its reach to the rest of former French colonies, where strategic interests are deeply intertwined with historical ties. The implications of this relationship's evolution extend beyond diplomatic circles, permeating the lives of ordinary citizens and their aspirations for prosperity and self-determination. Yet, the historical underpinnings of Franco-African relations cannot be denied. Colonial history casts a long shadow over present interactions, influencing power dynamics, resource management, and economic agreements. While post-colonial African nations like Guinea have struggled with challenges ranging from political instability to economic underdevelopment, attributing these struggles solely to France oversimplifies a complex web of internal and external factors.

Critics argue that France's historical exploitation of African resources, coupled with enduring economic agreements, has perpetuated an environment where African nations struggle to fully harness the potential of their riches. Decades of colonial rule have forged an intricate tapestry wherein French corporations have historically profited from African commodities,



leaving local development in the shadows. Acknowledging these legitimate concerns is imperative, but so is avoiding the portrayal of France's role in Africa as an all-encompassing negative force.

To rectify historical imbalances and forge a more equitable relationship, a collaborative effort must emerge. The path forward doesn't necessarily entail the abrupt severance of French influence. Instead, African nations can steer the discourse by engaging in diplomatic dialogues aimed at renegotiating economic agreements and trade terms. Finding common ground is paramount, as it will allow for mutual benefit, enabling African countries to leverage their resources for sustainable development while accommodating French interests.

However, negotiations to rectify these disparities are intricate endeavours that require unity among African nations. Past divisions and internal conflicts have thwarted collective action, preventing meaningful change. To enact transformation, African leaders must prioritize regional cooperation, pooling their collective bargaining power to advocate for well-considered proposals that address economic imbalances. It's vital



to avoid overgeneralizations that label all French involvement in Africa as detrimental.



Recent endeavours aimed at fostering development through investments in education, healthcare and infrastructure signal the potential for a more balanced partnership, given sincere and open dialogue.

In conclusion, the evolving dynamics between France and its former colonies, notably exemplified by Guinea, are emblematic of a complex interplay between history, geopolitics, and contemporary aspirations. While concerns about exploitation are valid, a comprehensive analysis requires acknowledging the

intricate layers at play. Rather than advocating for an abrupt cessation of French influence, a more promising avenue involves constructive dialogues, regional solidarity, and renegotiated terms. By nurturing collaboration and understanding, both Africa and France can chart a path toward more equitable and prosperous futures. As we unravel the intricacies of Franco-African relations, it becomes evident that the ramifications of this relationship resonate far beyond its focal points, casting a profound influence on the course of history in the making.



Chernor M. Jalloh is a Lecturer of Governance & Development Studies IPAM- University of Sierra Leone



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Rethinking 'Coups' in Africa: Beyond Military Takeovers



The term 'coup' on the continent has historically been synonymous with military takeovers of democratically elected governments. However, as we navigate the complex landscape of African politics, it becomes increasingly evident that the definition of 'coups' needs to evolve. It must encompass not only military interventions but also instances where civilian leaders manipulate elections, amend constitutions, and extend their rule against the will of their citizens.

The African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, specifically in Article 23, outlines illegal means of accessing or maintaining power that constitute unconstitutional changes of government. These include military coups, interventions by mercenaries, replacement by armed dissidents, refusal to relinquish power after free and fair elections, and amendments to the constitution that infringe on democratic principles. While this framework is a step in the right

direction, it does not explicitly address electoral manipulation, 'third-termism,' and other non-military forms of unconstitutional power grabs.

Consider the case of Guinea, where former President Alpha Conde's attempt to manipulate the constitution to extend his rule serves as a stark example of 'third-termism.' While the 2010 Constitution stipulated that Conde should have left office in 2020 after two five-year terms, he explored avenues to run for a third term, thus circumventing

constitutional limits.

This maneuver ignited protests and instability, ultimately leading to his overthrow.

Guinea's situation is unique because the 2010

Constitution explicitly prohibits altering presidential term limits. Conde's attempt to create a "new" constitution as a pretext to extend his rule must be unequivocally rejected by the African Union (AU). Such a stance would not only redeem the AU's credibility but also ensure that the situation in Guinea does not deteriorate further.

Cote d'Ivoire and Rwanda witnessed similar patterns when Presidents Ouattara and Kagame altered their respective constitutions to secure third terms. In Niger, questionable elections raised concerns, while in Gabon, military intervention became necessary owing to election irregularities. The recent Zimbabwean elections have garnered criticism for its significant flaws, with Southern African Development Community (SADC) and other international electoral observation missions highlighting issues related to transparency, independence, fairness, and credibility throughout the entire electoral process. Astonishingly, none of these constitutional changes or

electoral

controversies were met with the stern condemnation one might expect from regional champions of democracy.

The AU and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have been notably silent on 'third-termism,' which has led to criticism that

they often serve the interests of incumbent leaders. Such silence undermines the democratic alternation of power. It is high

time we extended the existing

framework against unconstitutional changes of government to explicitly address constitutional manipulation.

The implications of inaction are far-reaching. It sends a disheartening message that constitutional manipulation, a direct affront to the democratic will of the people, is tolerated or at least met with indifference by those tasked with upholding democratic values in Africa. This apathy inadvertently signals to power-hungry elites that they can exploit legal loopholes to stay in office indefinitely, all without facing substantial repercussions.



To safeguard the democratic aspirations of African nations and prevent the recurrence of military coups, it is imperative that we address these constitutional manipulations head-on. It's not enough to define 'coups' merely in military terms. We must redefine 'coups' in Africa to include non-military forms of unconstitutional power grabs, thus strengthening our commitment to democracy.

Recent celebrations by African countries of coups on social media have outraged many older intellectuals, but it's essential to understand that this support for military intervention does not necessarily stem from contempt for democracy. Rather, it is a response to years of electoral fraud, corruption, and oppression.

Africans have experienced a dilution of democracy, where elections are marred by irregularities, repression, and political show trials. Leaders who manipulate elections and consolidate power strip citizens of basic freedoms and human rights. We are no longer reaping the dividends of democracy. Many see military intervention as regrettable and unfortunate as it is, as the only way to break free from this oppressive cycle.

Redefining 'coups' in Africa to encompass non-military forms of unconstitutional power grabs is imperative for safeguarding democracy on the continent. The AU and ECOWAS must confront 'third-termism' and other constitutional manipulations head-on. Furthermore, gaining insight into the frustrations

and motivations of Africans is essential for rebuilding the foundations of democracy. It is high time for African leaders, intellectuals, and institutions to engage in a more inclusive dialogue that mirrors the evolving political landscape on the continent and takes concrete actions to protect democratic values. Ultimately, a universal commitment to applying the same level of global outrage and condemnation to third-termism and fraudulent elections is necessary, recognizing that all these actions fundamentally constitute unconstitutional changes of government and pose significant threats to democracy.

Abdul Tejan-Cole is a legal practitioner





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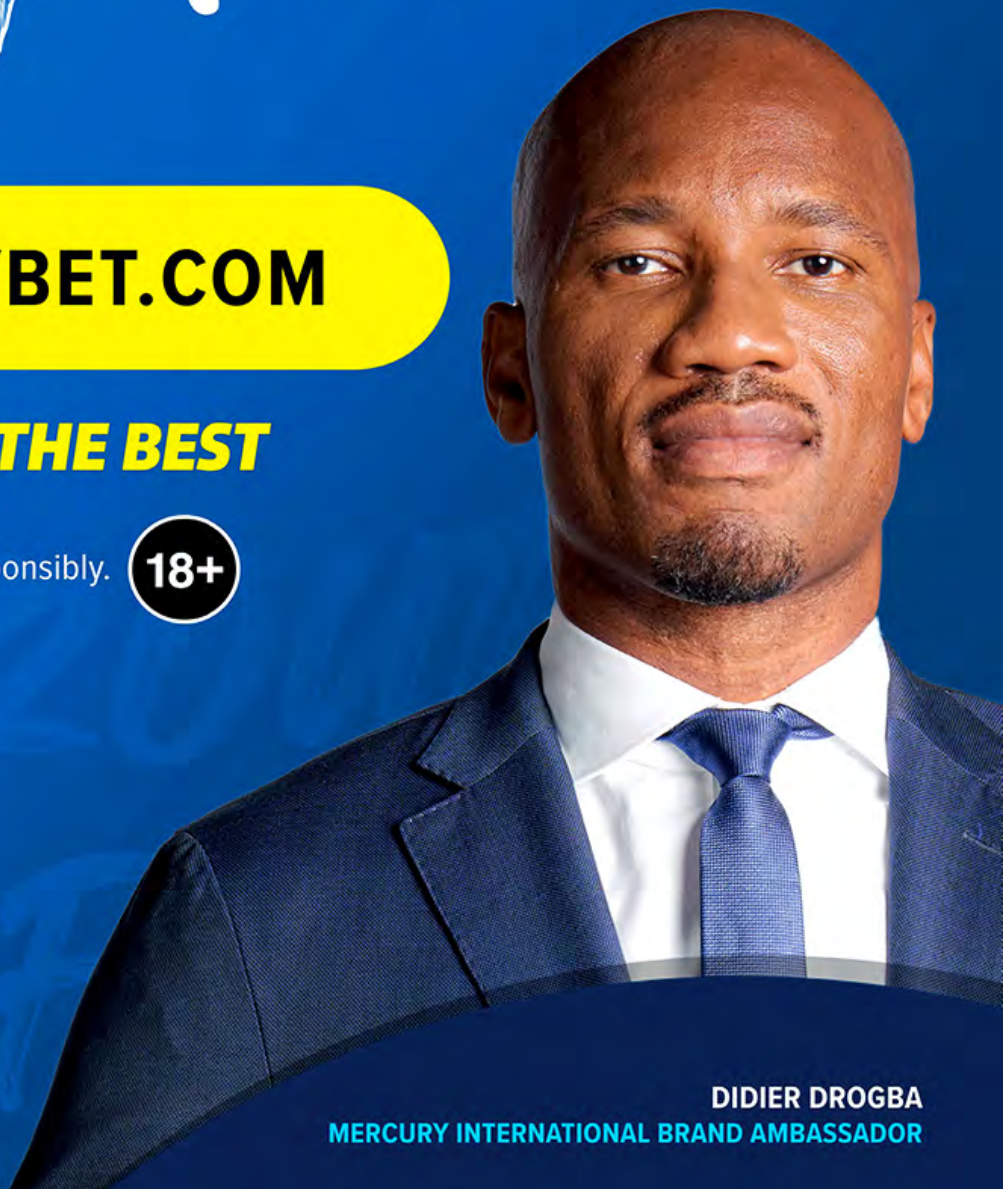
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MERCURY INTERNATIONAL BRAND AMBASSADOR

Learning from Our Children and Youth



Class 6 students at a municipal school in Freetown practising questions for the National Primary School Examination with Dr. Christiana Kallon Kelly, May 2021.

Photo credit: Abdul Hamid Kanu Jr.

Supporters of the Sierra Leone's People's Party (SLPP) are giving high praises to President Julius Maada Bio's new Cabinet for having the country's largest representation of ministers under the age of 45. Among this new generation of talented Sierra Leoneans are Salima Monorma Bah, the first Minister of Communication, Technology and Innovation, Cherner Bah, Minister of Communications and Civic Education, and Dr. Haja Ramatuilai Wurie, Minister of Technical and Higher Education,

and former Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and now Chief Minister, Dr. David Moinina Sengeh.

An increased number of young people, including young women, in Bio's second-term government is a national achievement that sets a precedent in Africa where a small group of old political leaders have marginalized the voices of the continent's majority youth population. But, progress towards social transformation in Sierra Leone can only be achieved if these appointments of young ministers

are met with a substantive understanding of challenges facing Sierra Leonean children and youth from the perspectives of young people themselves.

From September, 2020 to December, 2021, I conducted an extensive study across fifteen government schools to understand the experiences of students who were targeted recipients of President Bio's first flagship Free Quality School Education Program introduced in 2018. Through immersive research, which included volunteer teaching in one primary



school in the capital city and two senior secondary schools in the northern province, I heard directly from students their views and concerns around national issues such as education, politics, gender equality, and employment.

Prioritizing Student Success Over Party Interests

A major concern for students and teachers was the politicization of education in Sierra Leone. Students were very aware of longstanding political tensions between SLPP and the opposition All People’s Congress (APC) which have had negative implications on the education sector through the implementation of conflicting education policies. Progress towards resolving political differences around education sector planning was seemingly made back in April when Parliament voted to pass the Basic and Senior Secondary Education Act into law.

But controversy over the June election results has led to members of APC boycotting

Parliament for the past two months, leaving much uncertainty about the status of education reform in Sierra Leone. In addition, the SLPP government’s flagship program for the next five years has changed from education to agriculture and food security which raises concerns about the future national and international spending in the education sector in Sierra Leone. In light of these challenges, it is imperative that this new cabinet approaches education as a non-partisan issue and prioritizes student success over party interests

when implementing new policies and programs.

Gender Equality is a Challenging but Achievable Goal

Gender equality was another important issue that came up in discussions with students. Despite numerous gender reforms and community sensitization programs, many schoolgirls shared that they or their friends continued to experience sexual and gender-based violence in their schools, homes, and communities. “The First Lady has passed a law that says, ‘Hands Off Our Girls’. That a child below 18 years, you are not supposed to tamper with her. But I will just say, it’s just a law. But it’s not going through because you can see lots of it happening. Teenage pregnancy is plenty” (female student, 17).

But young people were still hopeful about the prospects of gender equality which many thought could be possible with the inclusion of more women in government. Female students were eager to participate in



politics, stating that “nowadays many young women coming up have a passion for politics” (female student, 17). Male students also envisioned a future in Sierra Leone where a woman could be president. “If we like her, we’ll vote for her” (male student, 16).

As more students are taking an interest in politics, increasing youth civic participation should be a priority for this new cabinet. One approach to engaging students is for politicians to host more public forums and public debates at secondary schools across the country. These events can present opportunities for the young to actively participate in policy discussions around gender equality and other topics and hold elected leaders accountable for the issues they have promised to solve.

Investing in Diverse Careers for Youth

Unemployment was a recurring issue facing students, especially those in their final year of senior secondary school who were considering their post-graduation plans. According to the International Organization for Migration, almost 60 per cent of young people in Sierra Leone are unemployed. While the typical Sierra Leonean parent may desire for their children to become doctors, lawyers, or engineers, the country’s current education and economic reality make these professional aspirations simply unattainable for the majority of young people. Young people need to be introduced to more ideas of career success and the government should invest in a diverse range of employment opportunities for youth that includes skilled labour, entrepreneurship, and creative arts.

Creating the Futures Young People Want

By no means should children and youth have to carry the responsibility for national development in Sierra Leone. However, the appointment of the young cabinet presents a unique opportunity for young people to actively participate in creating the future that they want. One can only hope that celebrations of a youthful Cabinet are met with a genuine commitment to engaging the voices of children and youth on various social and political issues and actually responding to their concerns.

Dr. Christiana Kallon Kelly is a Chancellor Postdoctoral Scholar in the Department of African American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Follow her on Twitter @cskallon



The Impact of Indignity on Sierra Leone's Health System:

A Focus on Women's Health

“The State of Salone Women's Health” webinar hosted in June 2023 presented an interdisciplinary panel of public health, medical, law and finance professionals. This panel discussed and defined systemic challenges in the Sierra Leonean healthcare system and highlighted potential solutions to improving the overall health quality and infrastructure, especially as it pertains to women's health issues. Cutting across the range of health challenges attributed to poor health outcomes is the need to prioritize dignity. Dignity, or lack thereof, is a key component which negatively impacts the health outcomes of women in Sierra Leone

Dignity is defined as the “communal responsibility and respect for self and others.” which takes responsibility for the health and well-being of others.

According to Sierra Leonean media personality, Vickie Remoe, dignity differentiates the infrastructure development in Rwanda and Sierra Leone. Dignity is a pillar of the President of Rwanda Paul Kagame's motto, which is “Agaciro,” meaning “Claim your dignity.” Both countries have experienced traumatic civil conflicts, with the Rwanda Civil War (1990 to 1994), the Rwanda Genocide (1994) and the Sierra Leone Civil War (1991 to 2002). Through these traumatic experiences, Rwanda has consistently valued healthcare through prioritizing training and provisions of locally based healthcare workers. This effort has contributed to major improvements in healthcare. Currently, over 90% of the population is covered through the Community-Based Health Insurance Program and the establishment of new health posts to reduce patient walking



time to health facilities.

Symptoms of indignity have led to growing distrust of Sierra Leone's health infrastructure and the fragile institutionalization of healthcare professionals, which are deteriorating the healthcare system. What health outcomes can be expected if the quality and quantity of inputs placed into the health system are strained? Not surprisingly, health outcomes are inequitably experienced, and people, particularly pregnant women, sometimes prefer to access care out of the country as there is a belief that it is of better quality. These symptoms influence our confidence in the health system of Sierra Leone, which impacts healthcare-seeking behaviours.

The poor health outcomes witnessed by Sierra Leonean women indicate the underlying deeper-rooted challenges. One of these poor health outcomes include the high maternal mortality ratio, which is impacted



by the availability of supplies, health care providers, and health service delivery, among other factors. Lack or limitations of these variables cause women and their families to scavenge for needed supplies, insufficient staff presence, absence of personalized care, and delayed or inaccessible treatment, to name but a few. In addition to these systemic challenges within the healthcare system, women face additional challenges affecting their sexual and reproductive health.

Women's health is threatened by early childbearing, teenage pregnancy, poor maternal mortality, and sexual violence, among others. According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the fertility rate in Sierra Leone is 3.9 births per woman, a decrease from the fertility rate in 2008 of 5.1 births per woman. In 2018, 19.8% of women aged 15 to 49 years reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months. Of women 20 to 24, 29.6% were married or in a union before 18. These unsettling metrics paint a picture of the current health landscape for women in Sierra Leone and how the lack of health dignity can, over time, result in poor health outcomes.

How can we gain dignity in our health sector? Health financing should be prioritized to produce better outcomes by robustly allocating local resources to



the health sector. Healthcare providers must be adequately and consistently paid or compensated for their time and expertise to enable them work and care for patients. Healthcare providers are pillars of the health system and they need to have constant access to basic supplies (i.e., blood pressure machines, glucose monitoring machines) and medications to minimize treatment delays. In addition to adequately paying healthcare providers, patients need to be treated with respect when they come to facilities and the set of services provided should be clearly defined. Healthcare providers and patients are stakeholders of the healthcare system and can become ambassadors of the health system if they are in an empowering environment and enable citizens to trust the health system.

Further, empowering healthcare providers and patients also involves coordinating focus groups with a range of healthcare professionals and patients who identify challenges they experience in health and potential solutions for those challenges. This qualitative research approach can allow challenges to be directly addressed contextually and

appropriately. To supplement investments in health inputs, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure supplies and medications are secured. There is a need for measures to ensure supplies reach the intended parties and/or patients, which can be done by digitizing supply management.

Building a better health system in Sierra Leone requires evaluating current health inputs using data-driven methods, creating and implementing contextually appropriate interventions, increasing health investments and sustaining health inputs. This can be achieved by employing sustainable practices that set the stage for improvements in health outcomes particularly those that will benefit women's health. Evaluating inputs can improve health outputs and input-output linkages by strategically developing operations that can potentially increase health outcomes. A better health system in Sierra Leone is actualizable by investing in our health system inputs and reclaiming Sierra Leone's dignity for the health sector.

Khadija Kamara MPH, Eunice N. Mustapha LL.M, Fatu Amara, Jonta Kamara MPH



Wata for Wata:

Unveiling Struggles and Empowerment in Sierra Leone's Quest for Water Access

Peering into the daily lives of Freetown's suburban residents, the struggle for water access might seem a distant concern, easily brushed aside in the busyness of our routines. Yet, if we pull back the curtain on these comfortable neighbourhoods and venture into the vulnerable and impoverished communities, we uncover a dire reality. The challenges to water access, which we often perceive as fleeting inconveniences are severely impacting women and girls, fueling conflicts over water, and exposing individuals to the perils of sexual and gender-based violence. Some residents dig wells or boreholes behind their homes while others rely on public pipelines for weekly water supply.

We must recognize the critical importance of achieving this goal, particularly for impoverished communities that suffer from inadequate access to clean water and sanitation facilities. Although the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 6 strives to "ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all" by 2030, thousands nationwide, including Freetown, still lack safe water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities. Despite some progress, the provision of these fundamental necessities remains inadequate.

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022 highlights a staggering fact: "For at least 3 billion people, the quality of water they rely on is unknown due to a lack of monitoring." Water is a critical component of sustainable development – it is the linchpin in sustainable development – and is under severe threat from various societal challenges including sexual and gender-based violence. The demand for water is rising because of fast population expansion, urbanization, and increased pressure from agriculture, industry, and the energy sector.

Progress and Initiatives in Sierra Leone

In recent years, UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and Freetown City Council have collaboratively worked to address water challenges in Freetown communities, notably those grappling with acute water



issues. By embracing innovative solutions, these initiatives intend to enhance water access. Through close interactions with these communities, the extent of the water crisis becomes clear, particularly the burdens faced by women and girls who often shoulder the responsibility of water procurement. These engagements with the communities revealed several dimensions of the water crisis in the city especially the challenges women and girls face in most households, as they carry the sole responsibility of obtaining water for their homes.

In June 2022, the UNCDF and Freetown City Council joined hands with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to





confront these challenges head-on. Supported by organizations like the Institute of Legal Research and Advocacy for Justice (ILRAJ), the Federation for Urban and Rural Poor (FEDURP), the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), Sierra Leone Labour Congress, and Sierra Leone Employers' Federation, they launched the "Women for Water and Peace" (W4WP) Project. With funding from the United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund. This initiative targets five wards in the Freetown Municipal area - Ward 401 - Mayinkineh, Ward 408 - Rokupa, Ward 435 - Dwarzak, Ward 442 - Lumley, and Ward 443 - Crab Town in the Freetown Municipal area - aiming to empower young women from these communities to champion change through the establishment of twenty-five

water kiosks equipped with solar-powered purification systems. This innovative infrastructure development, driven by a community-led approach, not only provides clean water to underserved populations but also cultivates a path toward positive transformation and peace. Young women from the selected communities are given the opportunity to run the kiosks as companies and become agents of change and peace.

A Roadmap for Change

Going into these communities under the banner of the W4WP project, ILRAJ got to interact and engage with the community by speaking to the local stakeholders and councillors, who in turn gave access to speak to the women of the community. Such engagement with the women and girls uncovered various stories bordering on

sexual and gender-based violence in relation to accessing water. These stories ranged from abusive households, unwanted relationships and teenage pregnancy.

According to what we learned from the communities, adolescent females had no choice but to engage in sexual encounters with senior males or even their age mates who oversaw the running of the community wells to gain access to water. We also came across the term 'wata for wata,' which refers to the practice of using women's and young girls' bodies to allow them to gain access to water. Listening to these perspectives and providing a platform for members of these communities has greatly empowered the residents. Providing them with relevant simplified laws, general information and knowledge



on sexual and gender-based violence, such as where to ask for support or report such instances, will potentially help them safeguard and protect themselves in the future and also empower the community's women and girls.

Further interactions with the community allowed various individuals to freely open up to us about their first-hand experiences with water problems. It has been exciting learning from these communities, in turn, as they also teach us the harsh realities existing right under our noses but how they have found ways to live with it and their temerity can teach many. While

water scarcity has enabled conflict to arise in communities, these communities are now approaching the conversation of access to water with a clearer mindset. Providing access to sustainable water can only work by listening to the community and returning to the drawing board to find efficient ways by having the necessary back-and-forth conversations. Most members are ready to put measures into place to sustain and maintain these infrastructures.

The Road Ahead

The journey toward ensuring available and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all impoverished

communities in Freetown is a testament to the country's dedication to improving the lives of its citizens. Through the collective efforts of government, international partners, and local communities, providing sustainable water is not just a goal but a promise of a healthier, more prosperous future for Sierra Leone. While progress has been made, challenges persist, but the step taken is a beacon of hope that showcases the power of collaboration and determination in shaping a better world for all.

Sierra Leone must target equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, adequate sanitation facilities, improved water quality, and increased water-use efficiency. Persistent dedication, as well as innovative ideas, will be critical in overcoming these barriers. It is feasible to effect positive and long-term change resulting in better living conditions and increased well-being for needy individuals.



Mayanie Yeatie Koroma is a legal practitioner



From FC Kallon to International Dreams: An Interview with Rising Star AdamaKargbo



Sierraeye: What initially drew you to the football world and, specifically, FC Kallon?

AdamaKargbo: My father was a star player while I was a young girl. People praised him for his football skills, and I decided to copy him by going into football, particularly FC Kallon, where I believed my football talents could be improved. The team had one of the most important players who have played in international competitions, and I also have the potential to reach that level.

Sierraeye: As the recipient of the prestigious 'Player of the Year award,' how do you perceive the current state of Sierra Queens, and what role do you believe the team plays in the development of women's football?

AdamaKargbo: I was shocked when I got the award because more than 50 teams participated in the tournament, but I offered my best to emerge as the best player. By getting the award, I made my team and my family proud. Besides improving girls' football talents, the team also academically empowers women. Female players are

sponsored in their educational careers from primary to tertiary level. With such empowerment, female players could be useful when they leave the football field.

Sierraeye: Throughout your time at Sierra Queens, what notable achievements and honours have you brought to the club, and how have these experiences shaped your growth as a footballer?

AdamaKargbo: I have won several honours, but the most outstanding was the 'Player of the Year' award. With this

honour and recognition, I hope to get more awards, which means I should be obedient and hardworking.

I come to the training ground on time, if not in time, to attend all drills.

Sierraeye: With the recent recognition, do you have aspirations of securing more trophies for Sierra Queens in the future? How do you plan to contribute to the team's continued success?

AdamaKargbo: I strongly eye this season's trophy, whose competition starts this September. I strongly believe the trophy belongs to my team, and we will work for it. I would play hard to bring more laurels, especially international trophies. To achieve this objective, I will encourage my colleagues to offer their best to the club, and I will personally do my best.

Sierraeye: Reflecting on your journey with the club thus far, could you describe some of the memorable moments and challenges you have encountered?

AdamaKargbo: My best and most memorable moment was my trip to Senegal, my first time boarding an aircraft and the other memorable moment was the day I won the 'best player' award.

However, I have not faced any challenges throughout my stay in the club.

Sierraeye: How would you characterise your relationship

with the management and coaching staff of Sierra Queens? How do they support your growth and development as a player?

AdamaKargbo: I have been enjoying a very good relationship with the management and coaching staff of Sierra Queens, as there has always been cordiality. With this strong relationship, the coaching staff sometimes check on me to see if I am not too okay to know what is happening, especially if I will come to the field to train.

Sierraeye: While you excel for Sierra Queens, what are your goals and ambitions for Sierra Queens, the Sierra Leone Women's National Team, as your career progresses?

AdamaKargbo: My ambition is to reach the level that male players in the national team have attained, and I am also ambitious about seeing Sierra Queens taking part in international matches and bringing home trophies so that Sierra Leone could take pride in us. I also aspire to play in the female national team, where I hope to contribute strongly to take the team to higher heights.

Sierraeye: As a shining example for aspiring female footballers, how do you intend to inspire and motivate your colleagues to view football as a viable and rewarding profession?

AdamaKargbo: First and foremost, setting good examples through deep commitment to the game, hard work, perseverance, personal development and,

above all, discipline will go a long way in inspiring and motivating others to come to the game. I will also encourage colleague players to put more effort by attending all training sessions and obeying the coaching staff as well as management.

Sierraeye: Building strong relationships with fellow footballers is crucial for the team's success, how do you foster camaraderie and collaboration among teammates on and off the field?

AdamaKargbo: It is a normal way of life for me to make fun of colleagues whenever I am in the field to play the ball, and they also have fun with me. That fun brings about a rosy relationship with my colleagues and also builds team spirit, which is necessary for the success of the team as players see themselves as members of one family.

Sierraeye: How do you leverage this relationship in the club's interest?

AdamaKargbo: It is not a single player that plays football. In the field, you have your best friend and other friends, and we need to play together in a team spirit to achieve the team's aim.

Sierraeye: Given your drive for competition and aspirations to elevate football to new heights, what strategies or steps do you envision taking to achieve this goal on a broader scale?

AdamaKargbo: Taking football to higher heights involves a lot as it calls for one to have a

dream or vision which leads them to the aim. To take football to new heights, I will offer my best to ensure we reach that level. Commitment to the game, respect, obedience, and attending training practices, particularly self-training exercises are necessary for us to be there.

Sierraeye: Football has historically been perceived as a male-dominated domain. How do you challenge this perception through your actions on the field and your advocacy off the field?

AdamaKargbo: We female footballers have to show that a woman can do whatever a man does, and we must work hard and reach that level to change the narrative. Off the field, I also talk to my colleagues and those who are yet to start playing to come on board to show the world that we can break barriers.

Sierraeye: In what ways do you believe that increased visibility and recognition of female

footballers can contribute to the empowerment of women and girls in Sierra Leone and beyond?

AdamaKargbo: We female footballers can be empowered by giving us more attention and treating us like male footballers. I believe that empowerment starts by ending discrimination, and they need to present us outside so that we can showcase our talents to attract investment from international football clubs.

Sierraeye: Could you share any advice or words of encouragement for young girls who aspire to follow your steps and pursue a career in football?

AdamaKargbo: Yes, and I have to advise my colleague female footballers to value the profession, commit much of their time and energy to it and persevere so that they can reach that level. Above all, they must comport themselves on and off the pitch to attract others who may see football as a profession

worth pursuing.

Sierraeye: How do you balance your commitments to football with other responsibilities such as education and personal development?

AdamaKargbo: It is not easy sometimes. Although education comes first, one has to choose what they want to be in life. I go to school in the morning and train in the evening so the two can move together.

Sierraeye: What legacy do you hope to leave behind as a star player within Sierra Queens and the broader context of women's football in Sierra Leone?

AdamaKargbo: My legacy I have always wanted to leave behind for Sierra Queens is to see that the team reaches the international women's champions league so that women's football can get the recognition and admiration it deserves.



The Rise of Youthlash: African Youth and the Democracy Dilemma



Earlier in September, the Open Society Barometer released a survey report titled *Can Democracy Deliver?* which found that “young people around the world hold the least faith in democracy of any age group.” Although revealing, the report’s findings are not particularly surprising. There have been several indications, especially in Africa, that there is a rapidly growing discontent among Africa’s young people towards democracy or democratic forms of government. The Open Society Barometer report confirms findings from other similar research in Africa, where over 60 per cent of the population is under 25. In 2022, the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) report described the increasing and worrying trend of disillusionment among African youth as a ‘youthquake’.

The IIAG report also projected that by 2100, Africa’s youth will represent almost half of the world’s youth. Therefore, this troubling phenomenon, which I refer to as the **youthlash** against democracy and democratic governance systems in the

continent, should be a central topic in our discourses. Here is why.

Let us start with Zimbabwe. Prior to the country’s August 2023 elections, Afrobarometer conducted a survey among potential voters. The survey result revealed that despite the high number of Zimbabweans who had registered and were willing to vote in the elections, young Zimbabweans were “less likely than their elders to report being registered, and only slightly more than half of 18- to 35-year-olds say they will probably or definitely vote.” According to the survey, only 54% of Zimbabweans between the ages of 18 and 35 registered to vote, as against 83% (36-55 yrs) and 72% (56+ yrs) of older Zimbabweans. The reason for this is simple - the youth of Zimbabwe, as with their counterparts in many other countries across Africa, are not benefitting from the dividends of democracy (i.e., respect for the rule of law, provision of basic essential socio-economic services, etc). Democracy as we know it has yet to address the bread-and-butter issues of

Africa’s youth and young people.

In contrast to their Zimbabwean counterparts, almost 40% of the 93.4 million registered voters in Nigeria’s elections in February 2023, were young people between the ages of 18 and 34 yrs. A further 35.7% aged between 35 and 49 yrs, according to data released by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The INEC data also showed that young people made up about 76% of newly registered voters, with 40% identifying as students. Anyone following political and other developments in Nigeria, could attest that this was a significant development in the country’s politics. This is because it was coming on the heels of a series of unfortunate events, namely the #EndSARS protests, incessant nationwide killings and kidnappings, and the cost of living crisis, all of which arguably affect young people disproportionately. Armed with their tweets and posts on social media platforms, Nigerian youths mobilised to increase the number of young people who registered to vote and those who actually turned up at polling

stations on election day.

However, despite the impressive turnout by young Nigerians, and in spite of the existence of the Not Too Young to Run Act (2018), which has legally created space for young people to vie for elective positions across Nigeria, the number of “candidates for the 2023 election indicates a decline in youth candidacy from 34% in the 2019 general election to 28.6% in 2023.” So, while the number of young people registering to vote increased, the number of young people contesting for those votes decreased.

On the one hand, youths and young people are expected to become active citizens and are encouraged to participate in politics and democratic processes. But their votes and voices are either silenced or suppressed when they do. The hopes of many African youths for credible change through elections are often dashed. Many youths who voted in recent elections in African countries, from Nigeria to Sierra Leone to Zimbabwe, feel cheated and consider their engagements with the electioneering processes as a waste of time.

Youthlash: young people’s response to the failings of democracy.

Like a backlash, youthlash refers to the deep-seated and adverse reaction of the youthful population against current models of democratic dispensation. It is the collective, often unplanned, but generally understood response of the

youth to boycott the governance systems and leadership structures in society. It is the undesirable yet undeniable wave of young people’s discontent with the older establishment in a country’s polity. In Africa, it is being manifested in multiple ways. Firstly, through a general reluctance to engage with politics or political processes associated with democracy and secondly, through direct violence or support for violent actions undertaken by others.

Youthlash is the counteraction of Africa’s youth against the older political generation as well as older political systems and approaches, with a view to causing or triggering change. Having tried and tested democratic routes to influencing change by voting in elections and supporting elected candidates, African youths have become scarily disconnected in some cases, demoralised and discontented in many other cases. Beneficiaries of the status quo may argue that this is not new, and that what we are experiencing across the continent has happened before, especially in the ‘70s and early ‘90s. However, the current manifestations of youthlash against democracy may be the scariest and most dangerous. This is primarily because youths now have the technological and mobilisation tools not previously available to previous generations.

Another way in which youthlash against democracy has manifested itself in the continent is through the number of coups

and the age bracket of some of the coup leaders. Almost all the heads of the military regimes in West and Central Africa are between the ages of 35 and 45. All but one of them is below 50 yrs. Burkina Faso’s military leader is 35-year-old Capt. Ibrahim Traore. His Malian and Guinean counterparts, Col. Assimi Goita and Col. Mamady Doumbouya, are both 42 years old. The recent addition to this list, General Brice Clothaire Oligui Nguema of Gabon, is between 48-49 years old. The only outlier to this age bracket among the coupists is General Tchiani of Niger. He is 62 years old.

What all these men have in common is not just uniforms and guns. They have all replaced old civilian politicians who have either thwarted or attempted to truncate one democratic process or the other in their respective countries. In the case of Guinea, for example, Col. Mamadou Doumbouya took power from 86-year-old Prof. Alpha Conde. Two years prior to the coup, Prof. Conde had changed his country’s constitution to allow him to run for a third term in office. I was in Conakry a few days prior to the contested referendum that allowed him to change the constitution. On my way to the airport on the eve of that referendum, the then President had ordered the army to take up positions in strategic locations across Conakry to prevent protests and riots. My driver at the time, a young man in his late 20s, told me that the military had been deployed in

mostly opposition areas. After the referendum, Prof. Conde used the same military that later removed him from office to shoot at and injure scores of youths who challenged the referendum results. Many of them jumped to the streets two years later to celebrate the removal of the aged President Conde from office and welcome the young Colonel Doumbouya.

The age conundrum: A young continent with older leaders

Despite the recent spate of coups and the relatively youngish age range of the coup leaders, Africa is still being led by older men. It is the youngest continent with some of the oldest Presidents or Heads of State. According to the IIAG 2022 report, Africa has the youngest population of any region in the world. The current median age in Africa is 19, which is almost 12 years younger than the second youngest region in the world - Latin America & the Caribbean (which is currently around 30 yrs). However, this does not translate to the age of the continent's political leadership. The current average age of the continent's leadership is 62 years. The continent also has some of the longest-serving Presidents, with some having been in power for over forty years. In displays of youthlash, young people in different parts of the continent have mobilised quiet or forceful revolutions to reverse this anomaly.

So, what next? What does the future hold for Africa's youth?

As a continent, Africa has an opportunity to remodel its

approach to leadership. This remodelling should comprise four broad elements.

Firstly, the youth and young people need liberatory education. Our current educational systems are not liberatory in nature and as such we are producing a crop of future leaders who simply copy and paste the leadership styles of the older political generation leading the continent right now.

Secondly, there is need to reimagine and redefine our understanding and relationships with democracy and democratic forms of government. This means, we need to collectively unlearn the various problematics that have bedevilled our systems of governance.

Additionally, we need to reform our laws and systems that prevent young people from contesting for elective positions. Nigeria already has the Not Too Young to Run law, which is good. But the major political parties have to ensure that they edit their party constitutions and amend processes that inhibit young people within their ranks from holding major positions.

However, while many would love to see a shift in the age bracket of the continent's political leaders, Marjoke Oosterom warns us to be careful what we wish for. In a recent blog post for the Institute of Development Studies, she noted that "the menu of strategies for authoritarian renewal has evolved to include a dedicated youth section." Regimes, she argued: "have targeted young people with preemptive repression, co-

opting vocal youth leaders into government positions, and youth employment programmes have been used for ruling party patronage."

Another element in this remodelling is the imperative for young people in positions of authority to resist the temptations of repeating the sins of the older political generation. Many young people with leadership responsibilities often tend to get carried away by the temporary privileges associated with their offices. Although the youthlash against democracy may be gaining ground in parts of the continent, and while various shades of authoritarian democracy may disillusion many young people, some do decide to join authoritarian democratic ruling parties. This contributes to what Oosterom refers to as "authoritarian renewal."

Finally, the future of Africa's socio-economic prosperity heavily depends on creating economic and political opportunities for its young people. Improving all the relevant components of a society is key to ensuring the continent's next generation's contribution to that development. This all comes down to a dynamic leadership and an inclusive governance architecture. It is therefore crucial that an enabling space is created for young people to thrive in leadership roles. It is equally important that when they eventually get into positions of power, they do not become political vuvuzelas - loud annoying noisemakers.

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