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**Public Services and Social Cohesion at Risk?**  
**The Political Economy of Democratic Decentralisation in Post-War  
Sierra Leone (2004 – 2014)**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

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## **Abstract**

On account of the many failures of the centralised state, decentralisation has become the preferred mode of governance in many countries in the developing world. Widely supported by international development agencies, it promises efficiency and equity in public service delivery and social cohesion in post-war societies by bringing government closer to the people. Crucial in the decentralisation promise, is resource diversion through clientelistic networks at the local level to consolidate political strongholds. But despite the ubiquitous nature of decentralisation interventions in sub-Saharan Africa, the continent has the smallest number of formal political economy-based analytical reviews of decentralisation and public service delivery, and research into the nexus between decentralisation and social cohesion remains an unexplored academic territory. This thesis seeks to compensate for this literature gap, provide critical insights into the politics of post-war governance reform and its neoliberal institutionalism, and the unexplored relationship between decentralisation and social cohesion in post-war Sierra Leone.

Based on a qualitative multi-site case study in four local councils selected across Sierra Leone's geo-political divide, the thesis unpacks the politics of democratic decentralisation and its neoliberal governance reform agenda. It provides a thick critical analysis of the motivations of Sierra Leone's post-war decentralisation reform and its uneven public service delivery across localities. It argues that Sierra Leone's decentralisation project is a patchwork of disparate socio-political, economic and ideological interests at the local, national and international levels. And while some progress has been made in local public service delivery, this cannot be linked solely to decentralisation. In addition, Sierra Leone's decentralisation project lacks a holistic inclusion of crucial elements of social capital and has negative effect on social cohesion, especially in ethnically diverse localities.

The thesis concludes that political affiliation does not necessarily determine a council's service delivery and management performance outcomes. And measuring councils' performance outcomes with technocratic tools unproductively seeks to transform political entities into barometers to measure donor investment in the decentralisation

process, and not councils' accountability to their electorates. Such a technocratic approach to governance is both normatively intricate and empirically unrealistic.

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## **Dedication**

To my mum and dad, Adama Bangura and Alie M. Tarawallie. I hope I made you proud.

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## **Acronyms**

A4C	Agenda for Change
A4P	Agenda for Prosperity
ACC	Anti-Corruption Commission
ADB	African Development Bank
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All People's Congress
BAN	Budget Advocacy Network
BCC	Bo City Council
BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examinations
CA	Chief Administrator
CDF	Civil Defence Force
CHC	Community Health Centre
CHO	Community Health Officer
CHP	Community Health Post
CHW	Community Health Workers
CLOGPAS	Comprehensive Local Government Performance Assessment
CMO	Chief Medical Officer
CMS	Central Medical Stores
CRC	Constitutional Review Committee
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CTA	Community Teachers Association
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DC	District Council
DCA	Deputy Chief Administrator

DDE	Deputy Director of Education
DDR	Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration
DecSec	Decentralisation Secretariat
DEO	District Education Office
DfID	Department for International Development
DHMT	District Health Management Team
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DMO	District Medical Officer
DO	District Officer
DPO	Development Planning Officer
DSDP	Decentralised Service Delivery Programme
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
EU	European Union
FCC	Freetown City Council
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FHCI	Free Health Care Initiative (FHCI)
FO	Finance Officer
FRELIMO	Mozambique Liberation Front
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDRDP	Governance Decentralisation and Rural Development Programme
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
HBA	Hospital Boards Act
HR	Human Resources
HRMO	Human Resources Management Office
IFIs	International Financial Institutions

IMC	Inter-Ministerial Committee
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INPSS	Integrated National Public Services Survey
IRCBP	Institutional Reform and Capacity Building Project
KCC	Kenema City Council
LC	Local Councils
LED	Local Economic Development
LGA	Local Government Act
LGDG	Local Government Development Grant
LGFC	Local Government Finance Committee
LGFD	Local Government Finance Department
LGSC	Local Government Service Commission
LOCASL	Local Council Association of Sierra Leone
LTPC	Local Technical Planning Committee
MCC	Makeni City Council
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MCHP	Maternal and Child Health Post
MCs	Minimum Conditions
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
MLGRD	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
MoFED	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
MoHS	Ministry of Health and Sanitation
MP	Member of Parliament

MTEF	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
NAP	Needs Adjusted Population
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NASSIT	National Social Security and Insurance Trust
NCC	National Council of Chiefs
NEC	National Electoral Commission
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NHSSP	National Health Sector Strategic Plan
NPEP	New Political Economy Perspective
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
NPSE	National Primary School Examinations
NPSS	National Public Services Survey
NU	Njala University
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
ONS	Officer of National Security
OSR	Own Source Revenue
OWL	One World Link
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PBF	Performance Based Financing
PC	Paramount Chief
PCC	Provincial Coordination Committee
PCRPP	Paramount Chief Restoration Programme
PE	Political Economy
PETS	Public Expenditure Tracking Survey
PFMRU	Public Financial Management Reform Unit

PHC	Primary Health Care
PHU	Peripheral Health Unit
PHUS	Peripheral Health Units Survey
PIU	Project Implementation Unit
PLDC	Port Loko District Council
PMDC	People's Movement for Democratic Change
PMs	Performance Measures
PO	Procurement Officer
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisals
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PSC	Public Service Commission
RDF	Revenue Development Foundation
RENAMO	Mozambican National Resistance
RCSL	Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone
RTF	Resident Technical Facilitator
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SARA	Service Availability and Readiness Assessment
SCSL	Special Court for Sierra Leone
SDPS	Service Delivery Perception Survey
SI	Statutory Instrument
SLGDG	Sectoral Local Government Development Grant
SLP	Sierra Leone Police
SLPP	Sierra Leone Peoples' Party
SLRA	Sierra Leone Roads Authority
SLTU	Sierra Leone Traders Union

SSL	Statistics Sierra Leone
SSR	Security Sector Reform
SSS	School Service Survey
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendants
TLM	Teaching and Learning Materials
UICPTA	United Indigenous Commercial and Petty Traders Association
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDC	Village Development Committees
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WAEC	West African Examinations Council
WARDC	Western Area Rural District Council
WB	World Bank
WCC	Warwickshire County Council
WDC	Ward Development Committees
WHH	Welt Hunger Hilfe
WHO	World Health Organisation

### **Author's Declaration**

I declare that I have read and understood regulation 17.9 of the Regulations for students of SOAS, University of London concerning plagiarism. I undertake that all the material presented for examination in this thesis is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by any other person, and has not been submitted for examination at this or any other institution for another award. I also undertake that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the work which I present for examination.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter One

### Research Aims and Methodological Settings

#### 1.0 Introduction

The decades since the late 1980s have witnessed the triumph of decentralisation over centralised authoritarianism in public sector governance, and decentralisation has become an integral part of the good governance and state building agendas, vigorously supported by western governments and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in many developing countries (World Bank 1989; Leftwich, 1994; Pierre and Peters, 2000). Since the late 1980s, over 70% of ‘developing and transitional countries’ have implemented or are in the process of implementing some form of governance reform initiatives, with decentralisation at the core of such interventions (Crawford and Hartman 2008:1). Its speed and support across countries and development partners is unparalleled in an era of what looked like a global good governance crusade (World Bank, 1994; Brinkerhoff and Johnson 2009). Its popularity was largely facilitated by an emphasis on the public service failures of the centralised state in the developing world (Wunsch and Oluwu, 1995; Oyugi, 2000; Oxhon et al., 2004, Abdulai and Hickey, 2016), and the need to articulate an alternative vision of governance; one that promotes ‘market-friendly, outward looking’ and bureaucratic formalism, underpinned by the efficient and effective management of the public sector and to bring politics ‘within the people’s reach’ (Wallis and Oats, 1988; Bangura and Larbi, 2006:1-2; D’Arcy and Cornell, 2016:264-265).

From a post-conflict perspective, decentralisation was, and still is, a key strategy for unifying warring factions, the cessation of insurgencies, ‘protect[ing] minorities and diffus[ing] conflict’, and in responding to the immediate, medium and long-term recovery stages of societies emerging from violent conflicts (Crawford and Hartman, 2008; D’Arcy and Cornell, 2016:264-265). In many instances, decentralisation has also been used to promote community participation through the devolution of local public service delivery functions, the maintenance of local level law and order, and the promotion of active civic participation in local governance and decision-making processes in post-war communities.

Sierra Leone has a history of centralised authoritarianism (1978-1992) and violent conflict (1991-2002) that saw the killing of civilians and the destruction of property,

institutions of state governance, public service delivery and community relations (Richards, 1996; Keen, 2005). At the end of the war in 2002, and like most post-war countries, Sierra Leone embarked on an ambitious programme of democratic decentralisation that saw the [re]creation of 19 local councils across the country.<sup>1</sup> The aim was to improve public service delivery and enhance local participation in governance and decision-making processes, and promote social cohesion by bringing government and governance closer to the people (Faguet, 2000; Government of Sierra Leone, 2002, 2005; Barankay and Lockwood, 2006; Zhou 2009); and to eliminate some of the pre-war centralised and dictatorial governance structures and conditions that partly contributed to the country's civil war (Hanlon, 2005).<sup>2</sup> In an attempt to prevent the reoccurrence of some of these pre-war governance limitations and to promote a transparent and all-inclusive local government system, Sierra Leone's decentralisation was built around a democratic and neoliberal compliance framework (Steger and Roy, 2010; Marriage, 2013), designed to be participatory, efficient, effective and, potentially, free from political and elite capture.

Since the introduction of decentralisation in 2004, Sierra Leone has been moving towards a trajectory of peace and growing socio-economic and political development – with three post-war national and local elections conducted peacefully – and the country has not relapsed into full scale violence. However, some of the pre-war socio-political conditions – among them youth unemployment, rural gerontocracy, ethno-tribal politics, corruption, poverty and inequality – remain pervasive (Hanlon 2005). In a context of generally poor public services across the country (Workman, 2013; Conteh, 2016) despite huge central government and donor investment, public service delivery outcomes among councils of different political parties are mixed, even though there is a standardised fiscal decentralisation formula and a single political and administrative decentralisation legislation exists. Thus far, there is no clear indication that councils controlled by the governing political party receive preferential treatment and unhindered access to central government resources, or that they are performing better than their opposition counterparts in public service delivery and general local governance management (Decentralisation Secretariat, 2006, 2008; Kanu, 2009; Fanthorpe et al.,

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<sup>1</sup> Freetown City Council and the town councils of Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Koidu were in partial existence and managed by unelected management committees appointed by the central government.

<sup>2</sup> At independence, Sierra Leone had a functional local government system which was dismantled in 1972 and then ruled by a centralised authoritarian regime for nearly three decades (see Jackson 2006 and Richards, 1996).

2011). This lack of clarity, both on the access to central government resources and the ability of democratic decentralisation to promote effective, efficient and equitable public service delivery programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, opens up questions on the role of decentralisation as a local public service delivery tool and on the validity of the political party deterministic argument of decentralisation (Abdulai and Hickey, 2016) which suggests that party politics and its commitment to vote aggregation in sub-Saharan Africa largely determines the manner in which local councils access central government resources – especially in states with weak bureaucracies, thus justifying the need for strong, apolitical and technocratic public sector management institutions (van Wyk, 2007; Hibbs, 1992; Schmidt; 1996, Ahmad et al., 2005).

While it is understandable that Sierra Leone's decentralisation initiative is still in its nascent stage – although 'ten to fifteen years' is a reasonable time to expect tangible results (Crook and Sverrisson 2001:4-5) – there is a growing body of literature that describes the institutional mechanisms, processes and challenges in central-local government fiscal, political and administrative relations in Sierra Leone's decentralisation arrangement (Zhou, 2009; Fanthorpe et al., 2011; Srivastava and Larizza, 2011; Jibao and Prichard, 2013). However, Sierra Leone's decentralisation literature is replete with donor-funded *projectised* studies, defined mostly by the 'what was done and how it was done' approach, with a dearth of empirical research – especially political economy-based analytical reviews of Sierra Leone's decentralisation, its actors, their motivations and varying public service delivery outcomes across different localities. This study argues that while such donor-funded studies of Sierra Leone's decentralisation are useful, they generally fail to grasp the complex, multi-layered and multi-interest workings and dynamics of socio-political clientelism and its implications on public policy choices and public service delivery outcomes in a post-war complex web of actors, motivations and relationships.

Research that situates collective community and social cohesion as products of decentralisation in post-war context not only remain a rare area of academic enquiry, the decentralisation and social cohesion literatures have generally been treated separately. As Scott (2009:14) noted, hardly any research on decentralisation uses the phrase 'social cohesion'. This study seeks to provide introductory insights into the impact and limitation of decentralisation on social cohesion in a context of an externally-led post-war governance reform agenda.

Based on a qualitative multi-site case study (Yin, 1994); this study undertakes an in-depth analysis of the institutional processes, mechanisms and motivations behind decentralisation reform in Sierra Leone. The aim is to provide a rich political economy analysis that discusses the evolution and model of Sierra Leone's decentralisation programme, its actors, their motivations and the uneven results across politically-divergent local council areas on one level, and on the other level, analyse the politics of democratic decentralisation and its implications for public services delivery in a post-war governance reform context with huge external influence. Primarily, the study analyses the formulation and implementation of the Local Government Act (LGA) of 2004, in particular its legal provisions versus actual devolution, the mechanisms of intergovernmental fiscal relations, and the cumulative (2004-2013) management and service delivery performance of local councils in relation to resource access from central government. It proffers plausible explanations for the uneven local public service delivery and management performance outcome among different local councils outside the strict party politics and vote aggregation argument and the dominant narrative that African 'governments provide more funds to regions that support them politically' (Banful, 2009:1, in Abdulai and Hickey, 2016:45). This detailed and critical analysis seeks to explain Sierra Leone's decentralisation model and the limitations of externally-led neoliberal state building interventions. It does so by questioning the donor-led preference for institutional technicism through project implementation units (PIUs) over the official state bureaucracy in decentralisation programme planning, management and implementation.

In this introductory chapter, the thesis sets out the research rationale and goals, methodological considerations, and approaches incorporated in the data gathering and analysis over a total of seven months of field research (two separate visits of three and four months each, between July 2014 and August 2015) in the four case study areas of Port Loko, Bo, Kenema and Makeni, including Sierra Leone's political and economic capital, Freetown. The fieldwork focuses on exploring the incentives and motivations of the various actors in the decentralisation process at the international (donor), national (central government and other public policy bureaucrats), service provider (elected council officials, council staff, chiefs and devolved sectors) and service user (civil society groups and members of the public) levels, and explaining how such motivations interact with a complex network of kinship relations, political party and ethno-regional politics,

economic and bureaucratic interests, and their impact on decentralisation public policy choices.

### **1.1 Research Rationale and Study Goals**

Evidence-based research on the nexus between decentralisation and service delivery in developing countries – especially in Asia and Latin America – is reasonably large (Crook and Manor 1998, Oxhorn et al., 2004). However, the same cannot be said for sub-Saharan Africa where there is a dearth of empirical research on democratically decentralised public service delivery initiatives (Conyers, 2007). As a World Bank review of decentralisation programmes in developing countries suggests (Ndegwa, 2002), despite sub-Saharan Africa having the highest number of decentralisation interventions among developing countries, the continent has the smallest number of formal political economy-based analytical reviews on decentralisation and its impact on public service delivery (Litvack et al., 1997). This study seeks to compensate for this literature gap.

In countries engulfed in conflict or emerging from civil wars and other forms of violent insurgencies due, in part, to disagreement over political settlement and the management of natural resources for instance, decentralisation has often been evoked as a peace bargaining tool – especially in situations where political independence is at the core of the disagreement – and for building social cohesion in communities fractured by war and social disagreements and divisions (Litvack et al., 1997, Siteo and Hunguana, 2005). But despite this close association between decentralisation and social cohesion, academic research linking the two remains limited (Scott, 2009). Over the years, there has been little or no academic inquiry aimed at establishing an associational link, or any form of evidence on the impact of decentralisation on long-term social cohesion prospects in societies emerging from violent conflicts. Whilst the focus of this study is on the evolution, model, process, motivation and uneven outcome of Sierra Leone's decentralisation programme, the study also seeks to provide introductory insights into decentralisation, the promotion of genuine community participation in local public service planning and delivery and support for social cohesion at the local level.

In countries with experiences of centralised authoritarianism, and regional and ethnic based party politics, decentralisation – especially its inter-governmental fiscal component – is often portrayed as a process influenced by central government manipulations 'along lines of political and economic alliance', and patron-client relations aimed at consolidating and/or expanding political fiefdoms, 'office-seeking' or

'[re]election-oriented' public policy pursuit (Schmidt, 1996:156-167; Keefer, 2002; Crawford and Hartmann 2008:16; Banful, 2009). Such manipulations, argued Ahmad et al. (2005:17-18), are based on political incentives, premised on the assumption that affiliation with the central government determines resource availability to local councils, and may possibly provide the impetus for determining the quantity, quality and efficiency of public services – considering the centrality of resource in service delivery. It is no surprise therefore, that donor policy recommendations (and in some instances, pre-conditions for funding) in many decentralisation interventions in developing countries, are often based on donor-led interventions which prioritise central-local government fiscal relations based on clear, predictable, independent and formula-driven fiscal relations (Bird, 2003; Ahmad et al., 2005:8; Steger and Roy, 2010). A contrary argument to this party affiliation narrative is one which suggests that African politicians sometimes target public resources towards opposition strongholds or “swing’ areas in an effort to induce them with development benefits, and that this may even involve the neglect of regional electoral strongholds on the basis that there are few votes to be swayed in such regions’ (André, and Sandrine, 2011; Banful, 2011; Abdulai and Hickey, 2016:45).

Part of the strategy in the clinical excision of political and bureaucratic corruption in donor-led governance reform processes is the creation and/or strengthening of semi-autonomous technocratic institutions, through the creation of Project Implementation Units (PIUs) staffed by some of the best brains within the country, and guided by supposedly ethically-efficient principles of resource management (Fukuyama, 2004; Greenwood, 2008; Bevir, 2011; Marriage, 2013). In this rational modelling of public service delivery, technocrats in donor-created institutions are presumed to be neutral technicians whose decisions are based on the separation of facts and values, with a clear and systematic process of data collection and analysis to generate ‘apolitical knowledge needed to identify the best solution to a policy problem’ (Bovens et al., 2006:325). It is an asocial interpretation of politics, and an attempt to depoliticise what is essentially a socio-political process, with disregard of the varying modes of governance, resource mobilisation and decision-making processes across different contexts (Bird, 2003). This study uses context-specific, multi-layered socio-cultural relations to explain resource access and service delivery variations among different local council authorities outside the political party affiliation argument.

Political party affiliation or the influence of party politics, has become topical in decentralisation discourses in developing countries since the late 1980s (Crawford and Hartmann, 2008; Ahmed et al., 2005; Oxhon et al., 2004). It is premised on political influence rather than logic-based or formula-driven central-local government resource distribution mechanisms that mostly benefit pro-government councils over opposition-controlled councils (Schmidt, 1996). According to this ‘partisan theory’ (Hibbs, 1992:316), the dynamics of party politics are a major determinant of public policy choices in multi-party democracies, especially in presidential political systems, where executive powers are vested in the president and his appointees. It eulogises political parties as agencies that respect the needs and priorities of their voters in a political system in which the opposition has little or no formal role in public sector management (Schmidt, 1996:155). In decentralised local government systems therefore, councils not aligned with the official ruling party face the risk of either being excluded or deprived of critical state resources (van Why, 2007).

However, the ability of local councils to deliver public services efficiently and in an equitable and participatory manner that guarantees social cohesion and stability requires a process of intergovernmental fiscal relations based on a realistic methodology that incorporates key variables such as population, public service availability and the income/economic status of each council (Manor, 1999; Ahmed et al., 2005; Crawford and Hartman, 2008). Such pre-conditions are crucial in providing the necessary financial, human and material capacity to plan and deliver services in a timely fashion and consistent with local needs and priorities. However, the central theme of the political affiliation argument suggests that in many decentralisation processes in developing countries, party politics – rather than an agreeable and realistic resource allocation formula – can easily become the deciding factor (Keefer, 2002; Ahmad et al., 2005). In such situations, resources can be disproportionately distributed and the neediest councils and their constituents might not benefit from central allocation, thus limiting their public service delivery ability.

Who would disagree with such a straightforward proposition? The challenge, however, is that political affiliation assumes the interests and motivations of political elites are monolithic (Blair, 2000) and largely driven by rent-seeking and neo-patrimonial tendencies, disguised by the intersections of the shadow state and informal economy (Reno, 1995; Olukoshi, 2005; Wai, 2012), thus justifying the setting-up of neoliberal institutions, technical requirements and procedures to prevent political manipulation in

decentralisation processes (Steger and Roy, 2010; Dafflon and Madies, 2013). In many situations, the bar of ethno-regional loyalty is in constant flux in recognition of and, perhaps, in adaption to the changing political realities. Opposing political parties are increasingly cooperating – especially where their common interests meet – with the ruling parties and some are benefiting more than pro-government strongholds as central government tries to lure opposition support (Banful, 2011; Briggs, 2012). It was partly in a bid to overcome this pessimism that Chabal and Daloz (1999) suggested that the way things are in Africa<sup>3</sup> – as captured in their critique of the rent-seeking and neo-patrimonial school – should be seen as the way Africa really works, as opposed to the orderliness that characterises western state-society relations (Olukoshi, 2005). The so-called state of disorder from a western perspective, in many African states, is not necessarily one of failure and reckless abandon; rather, it provides a perfect ‘opportunity for those who know how to play the system’ (Söderberg and Ohlsen 2003:15). Such clientelistic network consolidation supports the illicit accumulation of state resources by political elites, ‘necessary for providing their constituents with protection and services in exchange for the recognition of their political and social status’ (Söderberg and Ohlsen, 2003:15). This is similar to what Keen (1994) refers to as the ‘Benefits of Famine’ – a critique of the paradox of wealth creation by and for the few, in the midst of poverty and misery for many.

However, the political affiliation narrative, or the ‘parties-do-matter’ hypothesis fails to recognise the complex interdependence in societies generated by a web of kinship relations rooted in deep socio-economic ties that defy technocratic political logic (Keohane and Nye, 1989 in Schmidt, 1996). The assumption that the needs and preferences of citizens are unambiguous and non-contradictory is dangerously false. In many instances, clients have demonstrated they are far more ambiguous and sophisticated than their political patrons think. In reality, the needs and preferences of clients are endogenous, and often, they remain highly ambiguous. An appropriate approach in understanding local level public choices and public service delivery in decentralisation interventions such as Sierra Leone’s, is the choice of a research design that seeks to understand and explain the socio-political forces and interests that shape the ‘actual configuration of state power at the national and local levels’ (Boone, 2003:7).

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<sup>3</sup> Acknowledging that Africa is a continent of over 50 countries, with over 1.1 billion people and 2000 languages. Such meta-narratives can be guilty of indiscriminate and unsubstantiated categorisation.

Although there are legal safeguards enshrined in the Local Government Act (LGA, 2004) to ensure fair and equitable intergovernmental fiscal relations, several complex agendas and relationships – beyond simplistic political affiliation rhetoric – are crucial in understanding intergovernmental fiscal relations, public service delivery and genuine local participation and involvement. Understanding and explaining these complex relationships and agendas, the nature and relevance of decentralised institutional arrangements, the impact of party politics and social relations, and the relationships councils develop with decentralisation actors is crucial in understanding the politics of post-war decentralisation, local public service outcomes and multi-layer governance in Sierra Leone (and possibly within the sub-region).

The thesis argues that local governance reforms aimed at improving public service are likely to succeed when firmly rooted in citizens' judgment of, and expectations of their state based on their local realities, needs and relationships. When decentralisation reforms are driven by external actors with a focus on a 'best practice' approach, and rushed to capture the right moment (Srivastava and Larizza, 2011) without reaching a consensus between politicians and citizens on the framework of post-war political settlement, it can lead to the creation of service delivery institutions and decision-making outcomes that undermine even local service delivery and social stability. As Therkildsen (2006 in Bangura and Larbi 2006:21) noted, whilst decentralisation may be presented as technical, it is 'highly political and conflictual', sitting deep at the 'heart of who governs' and his/her political and cultural background.

Sierra Leone ticks all the boxes for an internationally-led governance and state-building intervention following a brutal civil war in what was already a financially and bureaucratically broken centralised authoritarian regime which was failing its citizens in its security provision obligations and lacking a competent public bureaucracy (Keen, 2005; Richards, 2006). Apart from its ailing economy, which for a very long time was dependent on a donor-powered life-support machine, there was widespread political and bureaucratic corruption (Hanlon, 2005; Jackson, 2005). Donors were worried that corruption and the lack of bureaucratic capacity would possibly lead to the mismanagement of donor funds in an ethno-regional political polarisation (Kandeh, 1992, Casey, 2012) at the end of the country's civil conflict in 2002.<sup>4</sup> In addition, knowledge generation and dissemination of Sierra Leone's decentralisation project

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<sup>4</sup> For details on Sierra Leone's civil war, including its trajectory and complexities, see for instance, Richards (1996) and Keen (2005).

tended mostly to feed the research needs of its donors, with a focus on non-academic correlational analyses between decentralisation and the improvement in public service delivery (Zhou, 2009; Srivastava and Larizza, 2011; World Bank, 2014). This donor preference for institutional-specific research, in most instances the only funding sources for empirical research, left a big void in political economy-based academic research, which needs to be filled.

A recurring theme in this study is the ubiquitous and multi-denotation phenomenon of public sector corruption in the developing world (Kruger, 1974; Rose-Ackerman, 1996; Bardhan, 1997; MacIntyre, 2003; Khan, 2006; Aidt, 2009). Rose-Ackerman (1996:1) argues that ‘corruption occurs at the interface of the public and private sectors’, but quite often ‘officials simply steal state assets’...and the most serious case of corruption occurs ‘when a private individual or organisation bribes a state official with power...to obtain government benefit or avoid cost’. But corruption is a relative concept (Kpundeh, 1995), and not all bribes or illegal transactions are corrupt, which makes a standard and universal definition difficult (Adams, 1981). In Sierra Leone, offering a gift when visiting a traditional ruler for instance, is totally permissible and not considered an act of corruption (Kargbo, 2014). However, Kpundeh (1995) suggests that corruption in Sierra Leone is pervasive and occurs because of lack of accountability within central state governance structures. Therefore, part of the government’s argument for decentralisation was ‘to make the delivery of social services efficiently targeted, and to put in place safeguards to reduce the waste which had characterised many of the country’s social services’ (Conteh, 2014:229).

This study is not necessarily about the relationship between decentralisation and corruption – although a significant part of its analysis is about public sector management and the combined forces of interest and motivation in public policy choices and public service delivery. Rather, it proposes an approach that focuses on the institutional arrangement of decentralisation in Sierra Leone that facilitates private gain in public service delivery, and the implications for its uneven service delivery outcomes across different local council areas.

The overarching goal of this thesis therefore, is to explain the relationship between the transfer of political and economic powers to locally elected representatives, the nature of the devolution process, its actors and their motivations, and varying public service delivery outcomes in a post-war context heavily dependent on external support and

tutelage. Based on a multi-site case study (Yin, 1994), underpinned by critical context-specific political economy analysis (Rondinelli et al., 1989; Keen 1994; Landel-Mills et al., 2007), the research seeks to explain resource mobilisation and service delivery patterns and variations, whilst proffering plausible explanations for the uneven service delivery outcomes in four politically distinct local council entities in Sierra Leone. The aim is to make a theoretical contribution to the decentralisation and public service delivery literatures by compensating for the literature gap on empirical analytical reviews of decentralisation and public service delivery in sub-Saharan Africa. On a lesser note, the thesis also seeks to provide some basic insights into two theoretical issues. First, it seeks to shed light on some of the implications of decentralisation on social cohesion in a post-war context by attempting to initiate a conversation between two social phenomena (decentralisation and social cohesion) that have evolved quite separately over time. Second, it also seeks to shed light on the competing influences of local and international interests and priorities in governance reform processes in the developing world, using the case of Sierra Leone to highlight and discuss the limits of externally-led governance reform based on donor best practice within the context of sometimes divergent national interests and priorities on local governance.

It does so by exploring and explaining the socio-political and economic imperatives of Sierra Leone's decentralisation process, its modes of power distribution and actor interaction, and its consequences on public policy choices and its implications for local public services in different local councils. It emphasises the role of decentralisation actors, modes of influence regarding policy choices and gaps, and the product of local governance institutions, and how they are linked to prevailing donor-led governance reform priorities.

The four local councils (see methodology section below) in this study share comparable analytical characteristics in terms of their regional spread across the country, and political affiliation between the two leading political parties in the country, the ruling All Peoples' Congress (APC) party and the opposition Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). Based on the political affiliation and partisan arguments (Hibbs, 1992; Schmidt, 1996; Ahmad et al., 2000), and the ethno-tribal, regional and political divide<sup>5</sup> between the APC north-western and SLPP southern-eastern regional blocs (Kandeh, 1992), the pro-government councils are presumed to have more politically-induced access to state

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Seven for a detailed analysis.

resources, and therefore better prospects of improved public service delivery over their pro-opposition counterparts.<sup>6</sup> However, a couple of studies – especially the Comprehensive Local Government Performance Assessment (GLoGPAS),<sup>7</sup> and the National Public Services Survey (NPSS) – have suggested the contrary (Decentralisation Secretariat; 2006; 2008; 2011; Fanthorpe et al., 2011). The performance of government-controlled councils in service delivery is no better than that of opposition-controlled councils, and access to state resources based on a formulaic fiscal approach has never been a straightforward affair. Such evidence highlights the complex nature of Sierra Leone’s socio-political and elite interaction, and raises questions about the relevance of partisan politics and formula-based fiscal devolution in promoting equitable local public service delivery and social cohesion. It suggests that other factors are worthy of consideration in providing alternative explanations regarding the uneven public service delivery outcome among different local councils, and the underlying networks of relationships that influence service delivery and social cohesion, which lie outside the political affiliation rhetoric.

## **1.2 Research Question**

The research leading to this thesis was guided by one central research question: ‘How has the politics of democratic decentralisation in post-war Sierra Leone affected service delivery outcomes and their implications for social cohesion in the four local councils of Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Port Loko, since 2004?’ To effectively and adequately answer the central research question, the study was also shaped by the following sub-questions:

- What is the nature and progress of Sierra Leone’s decentralisation project?
- What explains the uneven management performance and service delivery outcome among the four case study councils of Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Port Loko?
- Does decentralisation support or hinder longstanding local processes of social relations and social cohesion in post-war Sierra Leone?
- To what extent was Sierra Leone’s decentralisation programme a product of a post-war donor-led governance reform agenda?

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<sup>6</sup> Acknowledging that such analyses present a simplistic local public service delivery trajectory that lacks nuance and appreciation of the service delivery complexities in a developing country like Sierra Leone.

<sup>7</sup> A local council performance assessment monitoring tool carried out intermittently by the Decentralization Secretariat of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. See Chapter Four for detailed analysis

A major theoretical contribution of this thesis is the depth of insight it provides on the model of Sierra Leone's decentralisation programme, its actors, their motivations and its in-depth explanation of the uneven outcome in public service delivery among the four case study councils. At the policy level, this thesis contributes towards triggering a critical, and possibly, an inclusive policy discourse on the nature of Sierra Leone's decentralisation project, its politics and power relations, and governance institutions. By exploring the relevance of the decentralisation dispensation in relation to how choices of socio-political representation and governance are articulated by ordinary Sierra Leoneans, the study asks, not if decentralisation is 'the good thing' to do, but how it was done, whose voice mattered and how it resonates with national priorities and ethno-political and economic relations (Boone, 2003). The study also asks different questions about the processes and relevance of Sierra Leone's decentralisation framework outside the donor-led correlational research preponderance, and its patronising uni-linear and teleological assumption of the relationship between resources and the improvement of public service delivery.

### **1.3 Methodological Considerations: Fieldwork, Data Analysis and Ethical Issues**

This study is an attempt to critically assess the allocative efficiency claim of decentralisation in a context of limited state capacity for public service delivery institutions, and to provide alternative explanations for the uneven public service delivery outcomes among the four case study councils in a post-war decentralisation context where trust and the institutions of conflict prevention and mitigation suffered collateral damage during a decade-long civil war (Keen, 2003; World Bank, 2004; Hanlon, 2005). In light of the growing academic consensus on the relevance of political economy analysis as a critical approach in understanding decentralisation interventions (Rondinelli et al., 1989; Keen, 1994; Landel-Mills et al., 2007; Ponce-Rodriguez et al., 2011; Dafflon and Madies, 2013), the research's overarching goal and its central research question (and sub-questions), a qualitative multi-site case study approach (Feagin et al., 1999; Yin, 1994; Audet and d'Amboise, 2001) was adopted to conduct an in-depth investigation on the impact of decentralisation on service delivery and its associated social cohesion consequences in four local councils in Sierra Leone. Picciano (2006) defines multi-site case study as a qualitative research method grounded in good observation – seeing, hearing, and experiencing – of events in their natural environment. Multi-site case study principally deals with the observation and analyses of multiple sites using 'cross-case comparisons and explanation techniques to analyze data' (Audet and

d'Amboise, 2001:1). As an empirical inquiry, a qualitative multi-site case study 'investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context', but with less clear boundaries between phenomenon and context, using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 1994:23). The term (multi-site case study) is used 'interchangeably with multiple-case studies, comparative case studies', and...collective case studies' (Mills et al., 2010:587). However, a multi-site case study explores a particular 'contemporary phenomenon...common to two or more real-world contexts' and seeks to understand individuals, events, policies and programmes, and how they are mapped out and represented in a particular discourse (Mills et al., 2010:587).

A multi-site case study provides an appropriate methodological tool to study the concept of democratic decentralisation and its impact on public service delivery social cohesion in four distinct – in terms of their political affiliation and socio-ethnic, linguistic and economic features, yet similar – in terms of the decentralisation policy, staff composition and performance management appraisal – local council authorities. It allows for the use of the same data collection tools in different local government authorities to understand and explain the planning and delivery of services – including leadership and management styles, and policy and programme preferences. It provides for an understanding of the different conflict prevention and mitigation mechanisms, social relationships and social forces that account for societal embeddedness, cross-socio-cultural networks, and how decentralisation supports or hinders such relationships and social forces through a cross-council analysis. In this way, not only were variations among councils in service delivery and social bonds identified, but the underlying socio-economic and political forces accounting for such variations were identified and analysed.

### *1.3.1 Study Sites Selection*

Four local councils – Bo, Kenema and Makeni City Councils, and Port Loko District Council – in three geo-political regions of the country were selected for several reasons. Firstly, apart from Port Loko, the other three are all city councils located in the three provincial (also referred to as regional) headquarters of the country's geo-political provinces – Makeni in the north, Bo in the south and Kenema in the eastern province.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, control of the four councils is divided between the two main political parties

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<sup>8</sup> Sierra Leone is divided into four geo-political regions (provinces) – east, north, south and west, with Kenema as the capital city in east, Makeni in the north, Bo in the south and Freetown doubling as both the western area capital and the country's political and commercial capital city.

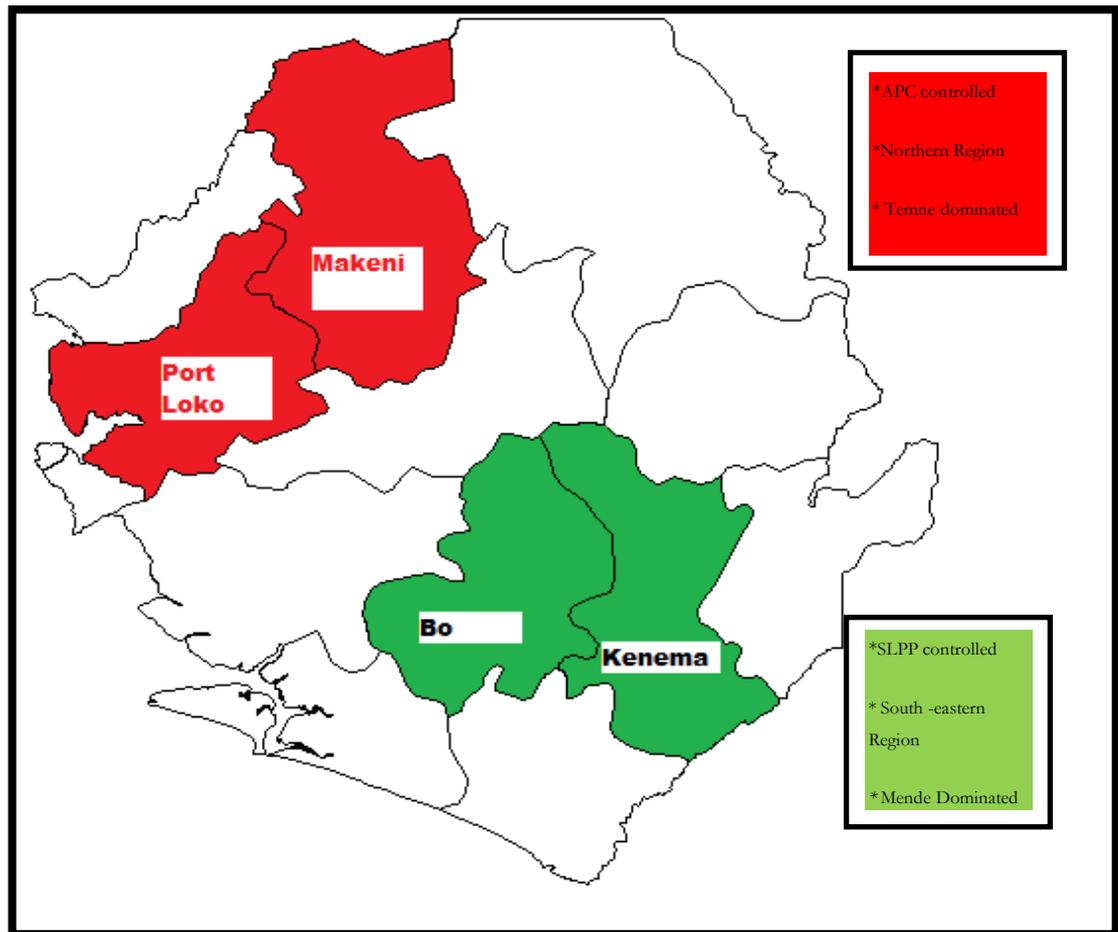
in the country. While Makeni and Port Loko are both located in the northern region with *Temne* as the major ethnic group and APC controlled, Bo and Kenema are located in the south-eastern regions, mostly *Mende* dominated in terms of ethnicity, and controlled by the SLPP. Similarities among councils, in terms of administrative organisation, devolution mandate and formula-based fiscal allocation, allow for a meaningful comparison of their service delivery patterns, resource mobilisation and development priorities. Their differences, in terms of ethno-regional and political divide, own sources revenue (OSR), population and public service delivery variations, allow for analysis of local service delivery preferences, community participation and cross-ethnic collaboration, conflict prevention and mitigation processes and the underlying socio-political and economic considerations that influence societal cohesion in each council.

Based on stratified sampling techniques (Neyman, 1934; Marshall, 1996; Teddlie and Yu, 2007; Warschauer, 2008) and the development of a framework of relevant variables<sup>9</sup> – regional, ethnic and political representation – a multi-site case study approach provides an appropriate context for the study of decentralisation and its implications for public service delivery and social cohesion in four different local council areas that are both representative of Sierra Leone’s main ethnic and geo-political regions, and equally governed by the two main political parties – APC and SLPP. The selected case study councils provide a situation for a balanced and optimum process of data collection and analysis, as the councils are regionally, ethnically and politically representative of the country’s geo-political regions, its main tribal (*Mende* and *Temne*) groupings and its two leading political parties. Freetown was not selected because of its status as the country’s political and economic capital with a set of services unique to the city, despite being APC-controlled since 2004.

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<sup>9</sup> See Annex A: Sampling Table.

### 1.3.2 Description of the Study Areas



**Figure 1: Geo-ethnic location and political affiliation of the case study local council areas**  
Source: Google Maps with author's adaption

#### *Site Details*

**Bo City Council:** Bo is situated in the southern province of Sierra Leone, approximately 164 miles southeast of Freetown. It is the country's second city and the biggest urban settlement outside Freetown, which was the colonial administrative headquarters for the protectorate (Alie, 1990). With a population of about 306,000, according to Statistics Sierra Leone (SSL, 2004), Bo City doubles as the southern regional headquarters and the administrative capital of Bo District. Due to its connectivity and proximity to the diamond and cocoa districts of Kono, Kenema and Kailahun, Bo is the business capital of the south and eastern regions, attracting mining and farming companies and individual business entrepreneurs; this has led to the establishment of a business and property-owning class of settlers from other regions of the country (Conteh, 2014). The city has a long tradition of western education with some of the highest literacy rates in the country since the establishment of Bo School in

1906; it also hosts Sierra Leone's second biggest university – Njala University. Politically, Bo is one of five (Bo, Makeni, Kenema City Councils and Koidu New Sembehun and Bonthe Municipal Councils) new localities that were transformed into city councils in 2004 as provided for in the Local Government Act (LGA, 2004). The city is governed by a mayor and councillors who are elected every four years (LGA, 2004). The city has a fair distribution of social services, with an electricity supply powered by the Dodo hydroelectric dam during the rains, but with limited or no supply when the water level drops during the dry season, and pipe-borne water supply in some parts. Bo is dominated by the Mende ethnic group (although other tribes are fairly represented in the township) and it is the strategic stronghold of the Sierra Leone Peoples' Party (SLPP), with almost 100 percent of its mayors and councillors elected under the SPPP banner since 2004.

**Kenema City Council:** Kenema, like Bo, doubles as the regional capital of the eastern region and the district headquarters for Kenema District, and is the country's third largest urban settlement. With an estimated population of 188,463, the city lies approximately 185 miles southeast of Freetown and about 40 miles from Bo. Kenema is a business centre, popular for its trade in diamonds, cocoa and other farm produce. As a municipality, it is governed by a mayor and councillors elected every four years. Like Bo, Kenema is a stronghold of the Sierra Leone People's Party and the Mende tribe is the predominant ethnic group. However, due to its diamond mining and cocoa farming, the city attracts a lot of tribes from other regions that are not members of the Mende ethnic group to the mining, farming and business sector, especially Lebanese and other West African nationals involved in the minerals trade.

**Makeni City Council:** Makeni is the third biggest provincial urban settlement after Bo and Kenema, and doubles as the regional headquarters of the northern region and the administrative capital of Bombali District. It is officially the fourth largest city in the country, and with the recent boom in iron ore mining, the city's population and economic dynamics have changed significantly. Makeni is approximately 85 miles east of Freetown with an estimated population of 112,489. The city has a strong Christian tradition with the Catholic Church, which built and manages the University of Makeni – the first privately-owned university in Sierra Leone, very much in evidence. The city council is managed by a mayor and councillors elected every four years by the city's residents. As the home city of President Ernest Bai Koroma and stronghold of the

ruling APC party, Makeni has attracted huge investment in commercial agriculture, mining and infrastructure – including tarmac roads and a reliable electricity supply – linked to its politically sensitive role. The city’s ethnic background is reflective of the wider ethnic diversity of Bombali district in which the Limbas, Mindigos and Temnes are the biggest and dominant tribes. As the northern regional headquarters, Makeni, until its recent infrastructural and economic growth (around 2008), had minimal migration from the south-eastern regions apart from government functionaries transferred there as deconcentrated<sup>10</sup> staff of central government ministries and agencies.

**Port Loko District Council:** Unlike the three city councils above, Port Loko is a district council with service delivery responsibilities covering the entire district and not only Port Loko Town. Port Loko District is located in the northern region of Sierra Leone, and is one of five districts (Port Loko, Bombali, Tonkolili, Koinadugu and Kambia) that make up the Northern Province (or Region). It is the most populous district in the northern region and fourth most populous in the country.<sup>11</sup> It borders Freetown, the capital, to the west, Kambia District to the north, Bombali District to the east and Tonkolili District to the south and occupies a total area of 5,719 km<sup>2</sup> with 11 Chiefdoms, each of which has a Paramount Chief. The Temne ethnic group is the largest (about 80%) and one of the most loyal districts – in the north – to the ruling APC party. Prior to the recent iron ore mining boom in Lunsar (in the Marampa chiefdom), economic activities in the district were limited to subsistence agriculture, although the district has some of the best lands for commercial rice production. The Port Loko Teachers College is the district’s most prominent institution of higher education. With limited financial activities and cross-district migration, Port Loko is one of the most ethnically homogenous districts in the country.

### *1.3.3 Data Gathering Tools*

The data gathering process for this study was principally informed by four intricately linked data collection techniques. They include secondary data review, semi-structured interviews administered at four levels (international/donor level; national policy level; service delivery and service user levels), focus group discussions (FGDs) and non-

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<sup>10</sup> See Chapter Two for the mean and analysis on deconcentration, decentralisation and devolution.

<sup>11</sup> According to the provisional result of the December 2015 Housing and Population Census, Port Loko is the most populous district after the Western Areas.

participant observation of the case study councils over a seven-month period encompassing two separate field visits between July 2014 and August 2015. As part of the data collection exercise, important documents such as the Local Government Act, the National Decentralisation Policy, the National Public Service Survey (NPSS) and the Comprehensive Local Government Performance Assessment (CLOGPAS) reports, the Chieftaincy and Tribal Authorities Acts, central government transfers and income and expenditure statements of councils, and other local and international reports on decentralisation in Sierra Leone, were reviewed and analysed in order to identify the processes of decentralisation formulation, its provisions and devolution progress. While documentation analysis was an important part of the data collection process, it was never a straightforward affair. Politicians and public bureaucrats, both in Freetown and in the councils, were very cautious and sometimes outright unwilling to give out what they consider 'sensitive' documents, such as financial statements, audited reports and minutes of council meetings, to researchers.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the document review, the research also conducted over 80 informal and semi-structured and field discussions which formed a major part of the research's main findings, analyses and conclusion. The interviews targeted key informants at four levels: 1) donors/international actors and 2) national politicians and public bureaucrats to examine motivations, incentives and implications for the decentralisation policy choices; 3) local public service providers (local council elected officials, staff and contractors) and 4), local public service users (such as civil society groups and ordinary citizens) to understand how services are planned and delivered and people's opinions and expectations of the nature and scope of the decentralisation dispensation. At the international/donor level, donors such as DfID, UNDP, the World Bank and the EU country delegations were interviewed. At the national policy level, government ministries, department and agencies (MDAs), civil servants, academics and other top public officials involved in, and or capable of influencing national policy, were targeted. Primarily, the focus was on the Ministries of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD); Education, Science and Technology (MEST), Health and Sanitation (MoHS) and Finance and Economic Development (MoFED). This was a straightforward decision as the MLGRD is, by law, in charge of decentralisation, whilst

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<sup>12</sup> Most of the major policy and finance-related documents were accessed in Freetown, although some were also collected from the respective councils. In every encounter, the expression 'sensitive documents' was constantly used to express fear or unwillingness to give out documents or information that is by law meant to be public.

MoFED is responsible for financial resource mobilisation and distribution to local councils. On a sectoral level, health and education were chosen considering both the extent of their devolution (see Chapter Five) and their centrality to human wellbeing and survival.

At the service delivery level, chairpersons of local councils, Chief Administrators (CAs), Paramount Chiefs (PCs) and council employees were interviewed to understand the nature, process and priorities of service delivery in each council, actor interaction and preference, and implications for service delivery and social cohesion outcomes. The last, but by no means the least, level of semi-structured interviews, targeted ordinary residents in the selected local council areas, particularly civil society organisations (CSOs), and traditional, formal and non-formal groupings, such as labour gangs, women's and youth groups. In each local council, a list of active CSOs and other traditional organisations were randomly selected and interviewed to gain insights into public perceptions of local public service delivery and existing modes of social interaction. An important advantage of semi-structured interviews during fieldwork was the diverse responses and perspectives received from respondents, highlighting different trajectories of the decentralisation process. On the flipside, however, many of the interviews took more time to analyse than initially anticipated and this presented huge challenges in identifying trends and themes due to the sheer volume of divergent perspectives.

In addition, the study also uses – albeit on a small scale – 14 focus FGDs; three in each local council area and two in Freetown. These were very useful, not only in corroborating facts and information from interviews and secondary data, but also in getting views from residents regarding local service delivery and local participation, including the activities of the ward development committees (WDCs), justice, security, chieftaincy and other instruments of conflict prevention and mitigation. Groups were typically between three to five people, randomly selected, but with a fair representation of all the major dynamics within society (including women, youths, the elderly and the disabled) to discuss existing modes of social interaction, how social relationships have evolved over time, and whether local councils are supporting institutions of social cohesion. The discussions explored peoples' coping mechanisms alongside their sources of hope and protection during moments of distress and need. Based on these themes,

group members generated their own questions, pursued their own priorities on social roles and social relationships and communicated freely using the lingua franca – Krio.

The FGDs were carried out in conjunction with non-participant observation during the data collection exercise. In each of the four local council areas, the researcher was embedded for a minimum of three to four weeks, visiting offices of local councils and devolved sectors, schools, hospitals, clubs, bars, community events – such as funerals, naming ceremonies etc. – observing public service delivery patterns, access to public services and community modes of social embeddedness and cross-cultural integration. Alongside these non-participant observations, the researcher also had informal discussions with youths in coffee shops and hang-outs in all four case study councils. The field observations provided important on-site information about public service delivery systems in each local council, especially how services are geographically dispersed in a locality, and who benefits based on the geo-ethnic and political dynamics of each council. In addition, field observations allowed for a better understanding of the local dynamics of social relationships such as how people react to social problems and from whom and how they receive support in such circumstances. The proximity of the councils – especially Bo and Kenema – allowed for a seamless integration of the study areas and easy movement from one council to the other, such that two research activities could be done on the same day in two different study locations.<sup>13</sup>

#### *1.3.4 Field and Post-Fieldwork Data Analysis*

The thesis's data analysis process was informed by its analytical framework, underpinned by a rigorous application of political economy<sup>14</sup> in a multilayered, multi-actor, and multi-motives decentralisation context. The data was collected using two main languages – English, the official medium of communication and Krio, a broken form of English which is the lingua franca. All the donor and national policy level interviews were conducted in English, whilst some of the service delivery and service user level interviews were conducted using a mix of Krio and English with notes taken in English. As a Sierra Leonean, the researcher had no major language barrier and therefore required no special language training. However, Sierra Leonean public officials are sometimes uncomfortable being recorded in research interviews, so in situations where the research was exploring sensitive and politically contentious issues, notes were

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<sup>13</sup> The distance between Bo and Kenema, for instance, is 38 miles and a taxi journey of less about 45 minutes and Le 30,000 (about £ 5) for a return trip.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter Two for political economy analyses.

taken and later typed and saved in multiple locations.<sup>15</sup> Also, all data sources were transcribed either exactly or in summary from the recorded version. The field data was coded using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo after the researcher had completed SOAS's graduate school NVivo training in June 2014 and reviewed significant literature on coding practices (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003; Bazeley, 2007; Gibbs, 2007). The researcher then read all the coded transcripts to identify themes and issues relevant to the research questions. In line with the thesis's theoretical framework (see Chapter Two), the researcher gradually built up a coherent and consistent set of codes for the analytical headline themes of context, actors, motivations, policy and programme outcomes, and social cohesion implications (see Figure 2) developed in an integrated and simplified approach, and this formed the basis for the final thesis write-up. Service delivery was scaled down to two public service delivery sectors: basic education and primary health. These were selected as they are central to human welfare and development and at the core of international and donor priorities as embodied in the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and resonate deeply with the government of Sierra Leone's development priorities as highlighted in the country's Agendas for Change and Prosperity.

### *1.3.5 Ethical Considerations*

In a post-war context such as Sierra Leone where a sizeable proportion of the population was in diverse ways affected by the conflict, post-conflict traumatic stress disorder and bitterness over the atrocities of the war are common. Asking questions relating to painful past experiences, or putting former adversaries in groups to discuss sensitive issues of the war, can be a recipe for renewed hostilities. As a Sierra Leonean, fully aware of the local context, the researcher had considered the possible risks associated with field research on the politics of decentralisation in Sierra Leone and concluded that whilst the study may have some direct connections with the war, it did not need to ask sensitive questions about the civil war, as it is not necessarily about how and what happened then. The research therefore posed no immediate safety or traumatic issues either to the researcher or the respondents. Throughout the fieldwork, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted based on the informed consent of respondents – after a clear explanation of the purposes of the study – while maintaining high levels of confidentiality and anonymity, and providing clear feedback

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<sup>15</sup> Including a portable external hard drive, Dropbox and iCloud backup systems.

with conscious efforts taken to ensure the security and well-being of respondents. All responses were anonymously coded and where a respondent's details are used in the analysis, this is only done with expressed consent.

The research also satisfied SOAS' ethics requirements for PhD fieldwork and received official ethics approval in June 2014. In addition, the research was fully supported by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) – the supervisory ministry for local government and decentralisation in Sierra Leone – and was also judged to have satisfied the ethics requirements of the ministries of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), and Health and sanitation (MoHS), the two service delivery sectors analysed in this study. Both ministries, as well as the MLGRD, issued confirmation letters granting permission for its devolved personnel in the four local councils to talk to and provide support and unhindered access to the researcher during fieldwork. Therefore, the study was within accepted levels of ethical consideration in qualitative research (Yin 2003), as no respondent was interviewed without their approved consent, and no respondent below the age of consent (18 years for Sierra Leone) was interviewed or formed part of the FGDs.

#### *1.3.6 Fieldwork: Practical Challenges and Limitations*

A major feature of Sierra Leone's geo-political landscape is the sharp division of tribe and region in political alignment between the two main political parties, the APC and SLPP (Kandeh, 1992; Casey 2012b). Such a divide can have both positive and negative consequences on access to information, and its reliability, which can affect research findings and subsequent conclusions. The complex nature of this ethno-political divide created a serious practical challenge during fieldwork. As a Sierra Leonean from the northern region, the researcher (especially in the south-eastern regions) was judged to be a Temne and therefore sympathetic to the APC party. The situation was made worse by the fact that the researcher has an elder brother who is an active politician and, at one point (2010-2013), a junior minister in the APC government. With the same middle and surname, the researcher was constantly mistaken for 'Mamoud Tarawally' – the APC politician. A serious ethical challenge of this research, and which the ethnographic tradition was completely silent about, was how to manage the researcher's family background in relation to ethical issues of honesty, researcher identity and representation (Jok, 2007).

In pro-SLPP councils, the researcher had to either disguise or fail to acknowledge family links as a way of managing the challenges of fieldwork in one's home country and the research's ethical requirements, as a very close association with the APC in SLPP councils will translate to lack of access. In Kenema City Council for instance, a senior council staff member refused not only to grant the researcher an interview, but was also completely unwilling to provide useful financial statements; and when he finally did so – after stern instruction from his superior – he later complained to a colleague that the 'CA is taking a risk with council secrets with an APC spy'.<sup>16</sup> On the flipside of this identity crisis and the access problems it presented, is the challenge of expectation in pro-APC councils. In Port Loko District Council – the home district of the researcher – for instance, the researcher was well received and introduced to council staff by one of its elected officials: 'our son from the UK is here on research; we are proud to host and make him comfortable, as we need people like him to tell the Port Loko story'.<sup>17</sup>

Undoubtedly, the biggest challenge of this research was the unanticipated outbreak of Ebola virus in West Africa, which significantly affected access to essential public service locations such as schools and hospitals and resulted in the planned single session of seven months of fieldwork being terminated in the fourth month of the research. Neither the researcher nor the supervisory team anticipated the enormous and deadly consequences of the Ebola outbreak. With schools closed and hospitals deserted, it became clear that ethnographic non-participant observation was completely impossible in Sierra Leone during the first period of the field work from July to October 2014. A practical and ethical agreement was reached with the supervisory team to suspend the research in October, and to return to the field six months later – in April 2015. During these truncated and protracted fieldwork periods, the strength of secondary data review was stretched to its limits due to the lack of database systems, both in the local councils and central government departments. The dilemma of suspicion and identity disguise in the south-east and the expectation of an over-welcoming host in the north were some of the main challenges of access and representation, together with the challenges of working in a context of poor internet connectivity and in a situation where councils and MDAs lack functional websites, access to basic but vital information such as annual financial statements require huge cajoling and negotiation skills.

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<sup>16</sup> Unofficial discussion with a member of staff of the Kenema City Council; Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Comment by an elected official of the Port Loko District Council during the official introduction of the researcher to the council, Port Loko Town (May, 2015).

## 1.4 Thesis Organisation and Overview

The thesis is organised in nine coherently integrated chapters. The first sets out the research's overarching goal and central research question, alongside its methodological and ethical considerations. Chapter Two reviews some of the core literature that forms the main theoretical issues, including a critical review of some of the conceptual debates on decentralisation, service delivery and post-war social cohesion and also outlines and describes the thesis' theoretical framework – guiding the investigation of the central research and sub-questions of the study. Chapter Three provides a historical account of decentralisation and governance reform in Sierra Leone, drawing on the country's post-independence governance history, especially the 1970s which saw the establishment of centralised one party rule and its foundations for dissent and war. The chapter also focuses on the trajectory of post-war governance reform, the evolution of decentralisation and the socio-political and economic dynamics of the decentralisation framework and its key actors and debates regarding its inclusivity, progress and challenges.

In Chapter Four, the thesis brings on board the concept of political affiliation and access to resources through an analysis of local councils' management performance and service delivery output based on the fiscal formulaic arrangements of decentralisation; it also questions the link between a council's political affiliation, its quantum of resources from the central government, and its overall management performance as judged by the evaluation instruments of the Decentralisation Secretariat (DecSec) – in charge of decentralisation management with the local government ministry. The fifth chapter analyses the process, progress and challenges in public service delivery in the four case study councils, focusing on primary health and basic education. With uneven management performance and service delivery outcomes among the four case study councils in Chapters Four and Five respectively, Chapter Six proffers some plausible explanations for these away from from the simplistic political affiliation argument.

In Chapter Seven, the thesis provides insight on some of the implications of both the institutional arrangement of decentralisation and service delivery outcomes for social cohesion, highlighting some of the main local forces linked to decentralisation that threatens social capital – the building blocks of social cohesion – and other institutions of conflict prevention and mitigation. The eighth chapter links the threats to social cohesion to the nature of the institutional arrangement of decentralisation and asks

whether such an institutional arrangement reflects the local socio-economic and political realities of governance in Sierra Leone. In Chapter Nine, the thesis concludes with a reflection on some of the key findings of the research and on the implications of critical political economy as a salient approach for understanding both the possibilities and challenges of linking decentralisation intervention and local public service delivery in post-war Sierra Leone.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Debates**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

Theories – though problematic and often open to conflicting interpretations – constitute an essential part of the lenses through which academic research is conducted and analysed (Sorensen, 2004). As Parker and Gagnon (1995:3) argued, ‘theory is not a superfluous distraction, but a necessity. It is the problem identifier and the information-interpreter in the research process’. The central research question of this study locates the thesis at the crossroads of two sets of normative concepts that barely speak to each other in decentralisation discourses. First is the literature on decentralisation and public service delivery; and second is the unexplored territory of decentralisation and social cohesion in post-war contexts, particularly in the developing world. Based on an empirical case study, the thesis provides in-depth insights into the conceptualisation and design of Sierra Leone’s post-war decentralisation framework, its actors and their motivations and its uneven results across different local council areas. The thesis also provides insights into how decentralisation affects processes of social cohesion in both homogenous and heterogeneous communities where ethnic extraction is a defining feature of political association and voting patterns.

Therefore, to demonstrate a critical understanding of decentralisation, both as a tool for effective and efficient public service delivery and for strengthening social cohesion in a post-war context – especially within the context of the thesis’ central and sub-questions – suggests the use of an appropriate theoretical framework on whose basis the empirical analyses are anchored. Thus, the framework connects the thesis to the wider literature of decentralisation, public service delivery and social cohesion on one level, and on another, it brings in coherence and systematic orderliness in data gathering and analysis.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first analyses the fluid and contested concept of decentralisation, focusing on its motives and claims, through a critical analysis of the literature across developing countries, to gauge progress versus rhetoric of its service delivery and allocative efficiency claims. The second section explores the uncharted territory of social cohesion, the key features of a socially cohesive society, the role of ethnic homogeneity in promoting social cohesion and/or social division, and

some of the mechanisms through which decentralisation may promote or hinder social cohesion.

The third section examines the meaning, evolution, dynamics and justification for the use of Political Economy (PE) as a theoretical and analytical framework in light of the thesis' goal of providing in-depth insight into the nature, progress and outcome of Sierra Leone's decentralisation programme. The examination of PE is relevant not only to situate and justify its choice in decentralisation discourse, but to justify its use and appropriateness in this study. The fourth and concluding section summarises the chapter with an analysis of the dominant neoliberal discourses of post-war state building, and how the fusion of security and development discourses informs decentralisation policy framing and international development programming and intervention.

### **2.1 The Political Economy of Decentralisation in Developing Countries**

Decentralisation theorising was initially spearheaded by neo-classical economists and public administration specialists (Rondinelli et al., 1989). While their original thoughts have helped shape our contemporary understanding of decentralisation, there is little insight on the context and the nature of interaction between decentralisation, political institutions and 'social forces within society' (Manor 1999:53). However, a growing body of literature on the political economy of decentralisation (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 1999; Willis et al., 1999; Manor, 1999; Bardhan, 2002; Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2003; Keefer et al., 2003; Hoffman and Metzroth, 2010) has identified a plethora of political considerations – such as historical legacies, the fear of losing political power, corruption and *clientelism*, the nature of political parties, electoral rules, traditional values, intergovernmental decision-making processes – crucial for understanding incentives and outcomes of decentralisation in developing countries. Therefore, decentralisation represents a fundamental change in the architecture of political institutions that determines how competing preferences are charted into policy outcomes, and in the distribution and use of political and economic powers in society (Robinson, 2008).

As a defining feature of developing countries, past legacies are important instruments of socio-political configuration and provide a practical lens for analysing how socio-political dynamics support or impede decentralisation initiatives (Manor, 1999). Experiences of colonial rule provide a useful lens to understand governance and models of decentralisation. In British colonial Africa for instance, the indirect rule system

(Manor, 1999) is considered a subtle form of decentralisation as it supports the election – or at least the selection – of local representatives, as opposed to the French system of assimilation which centralises governance (Crowder, 1978). Such colonial legacies were crucial at independence, for the organisation and governance of the post-independence state in Africa. However, in their analysis of the political economy of decentralisation in Ghana, Hoffman and Metzroth (2010:10) noted that the deliberate merger of two separate colonies (the Gold Coast and British Togoland) to form Ghana has had far-reaching implications for decentralisation in post-colonial Ghana. The Volta region has always feared domination by the majority Asante Gold Coast region, and has advocated for greater autonomy to a point that even the National Democratic Congress party, which has its support base in the Volta region, has been sceptical of greater decentralisation for fear of secession.

As the debate over politics, resource allocation, informality and state governance in the global south continues, a set of mostly Eurocentric writers (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; Young and Turner, 1985; Sandbrook, 1996; Bayart et al., 1999) have attributed Africa's imagery – depicting poverty, diseases, corruption, armed conflict and criminality – and the continent's economic and governance challenges to weak, vampire, failed states which lack the capacity to perform core state functions, such as public service delivery. Such negative and bleak conclusions about state capacity in the global south, Reno (1998) argues, justify the need for externally-led governance reform interventions and neoliberal institutionalism associated with state or 'institution-building' based on economic liberalism designed to promote 'world trade and global security' (Steger and Roy, 2010:72). However, counter-analyses from academics like Keen (1994, 1995, 2002, 2005) and Fukuyama (2004) have argued that conflicts, market failure and the state's perceived inability to provide public services in some countries in the global south can best be explained outside the lens of state failure and through an appreciation of a complex network of informal socio-political and economic exchanges that cross the boundaries of formal state responsibilities.

The complex nature of traditional norms in developing countries – especially Africa – interacts with the political actors and produces a further complex web of relationships that places demands on the political system (Boone, 1998). The system of governance, including the model and extent of decentralisation, depends largely on how the state manages these complex relationships. In most African countries, the institution of chieftaincy remains an integral part of governance in rural communities – empowered

by former colonial powers in ‘the suppression of local rivals’ and ensuring obedience to colonial rule (Keen 2003:71). Chiefs are the custodians of tradition, the enforcers of law and order in their communities, and control a valuable development commodity – land (Fanthorpe et al., 2011). According to Hofman and Metzroth (2010), one of the biggest drawbacks of decentralisation in rural Ghana is the institution of chieftaincy. While the role of chiefs remains crucial in any form of local governance, there is fear over empowering traditional rulers who are already powerful, and may pose a threat to national politicians.

In a post-conflict context, Keen (2002:71) argues that a well-intentioned government can be hampered by the politically and economically expensive task of introducing democratic local governance. The model and extent of decentralisation intervention within such post-conflict situations is a product of an intricate interaction among various actors and interests, especially when decentralisation is used as a bargaining chip with dissident forces in peace negotiations. Politicians at the national level are increasingly wary of the impact of decentralisation on their existing power and influence, even in situations where decentralisation may enhance their political reach and improve the nature of information flow (Manor 1999). In many developing countries, decentralisation deprives national politicians of their immediate access to resources and influence over decision-making. Quoting an influential member of the government of the Indian state of Karnataka, Manor (1999:60) shows how the transfer of powers to local councils can be negatively perceived to have reduced the powers of national politicians:

I am the Minister of Education, but I cannot decide on the location of a school in my constituency...that responsibility has now been passed over to the ‘Zilla Parishad’ – the local government council.

Decentralisation hinges not only on the power and influence of politicians, but also on what Keefer et al. (2003:5) refer to as the ‘politics of spending’. In feudal societies like rural Pakistan, landowners exercise control over rural voters and use such control to influence local and central politicians in the decentralisation process. Their influence over rural voters means that politicians sometimes prefer targeted government spending, directly benefitting their rural clients, rather than the provision of public goods.

Political parties are not only agents of political power, they also determine the extent to which governance is shaped and how political power is distributed across actors and

territories (Robinson 2008). Willis et al. (1999:8) suggest that decentralisation has a ‘discernible political logic rooted in the features...of electoral and political party systems...that differ across countries’. In many Latin American countries, for instance, decentralisation is a political bargain among actors across levels of government. The way such bargains are reached depends on the nature and ‘lines of accountability’ within political parties (Willis et al., 1999). In political systems where parties are centralised – such as Venezuela and Mexico – the central state dominates with a tightly controlled network of patrons and limited decentralising incentives. Conversely, in countries where the hierarchy of political parties is decentralised and sub-national officials wield strong influence – such as Brazil and Argentina – devolution is far more entrenched. Such modes of power relations, based on the nature of political parties, have far-reaching governance consequences, not only for decentralisation but also for the nature of electoral process and public governance institutions (Manor, 1999; Willis et al., 1999; Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2002). Within this context, Rondinelli et al. (1989:9) argue that, if decentralisation programmes are to be successfully implemented, the process must start with a clear analysis of the services to be decentralised, the dynamics and characteristics of service users, and how such services will be organised and financed. All of this must be grounded in ‘an integrated political economy framework’.

### *2.1.1 The Decentralisation Debate: Motives and Claims*

There are competing and fluid incentives driving decentralisation in different contexts, especially after the democratic third wave of the late 1980s.<sup>18</sup> With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, decentralisation in many east European countries was seen as a political and economic reform tool. In Latin America, the focus was to strengthen transition to democracy, while in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia the aim was to improve public services and respond to ethnic conflicts (Ahmad et al., 2005). Many countries that joined the decentralisation bandwagon in sub-Saharan Africa have done so on a poverty reduction drive, believing that decentralisation will stimulate economic growth and reduce extreme poverty. On account of its many failures, the centralised state has lost a great deal of legitimacy, and decentralisation is widely believed to offer a number of benefits (Wunsch and Olowu, 1990). Proponents of decentralisation base their claims on the fact that information is at the disposal of local authorities due to their geographic proximity. The fact that local councils are ‘closer to the people’

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<sup>18</sup> See Owulu (2006) and Leftwich (1994) for details on the democratic third wave – a term associated with the World Bank’s 1990s emphasis on good governance.

(Lockwood 2005:2) presupposes a better contextual understanding of local needs and priorities (Smoke 2003; Crawford and Hartmann 2008). By reducing the decision-making gap, decentralisation promises to enhance local participation, efficiency and equity in service delivery outcomes and shed light on greater public sector accountability (Willis et al., 1999; Ribot, 2004).

Decentralisation's allocative efficiency was trumpeted as a game changer in rural development (Lockwood, 2005). Allocative efficiency is the provision of services that are consistent with local needs and priorities (Tiebout 1956), whilst productive efficiency on the other hand, suggests a reduction or elimination of waste in the public service production and distribution chain (Barankay and Lockwood, 2006). Equal provision of affordable and accessible public services to all groups in society is a 'universal standard for determining' equity in service delivery in decentralisation processes, especially in socially and economically heterogeneous communities (Robinson 2007:8). Equity is not equal service delivery. It suggests a delivery system based on need within the limits of the available resources, but having cognisance of group dynamics such as income, gender, age and ethnicity, and spatial dynamics such as inter-area or inter-regional public services access disparities within and across local government jurisdictions (Litvack et al., 1998:8). Equity is widely recognised as a source of 'political legitimacy' and can be an engine for economic growth, as well as for societal conflict (World Bank, 1993:158).

In many developing countries, local councils face serious financial constraints, which limit their ability to provide quality and equitable public service. Where budgets are squeezed, the extent of equity is determined by the availability of resources. Such resources, Ahmed et al. (2005) argue, are mostly distributed based on political affiliation that privileges councils whose political leadership supports or belongs to the same political party as the central government (van-Wyk, 2007). The question, however, is, with limited resources and multiple demands, how do councils set priorities on which services will be provided and which sectors of the population will benefit or lose out? These and other questions constitute the core of the everyday political and administrative decisions that politicians, public bureaucrats and local council staff should take, decisions that are, in themselves, complex and largely influenced by local political economy considerations.

Accountability is used very broadly in decentralisation and sometimes associated with transparency or open government. It refers to attempts at reducing rent-seeking behaviour of public officials, such as bribery, corruption and clientelism (Lockwood, 2005) and to the active involvement of local people, through meetings, periodic voting, feedback mechanisms and representation in key decision-making processes that affect their lives. In some contexts, it can include reserved seats for disadvantaged groups, such as women, young people or members of a lower caste – as in the Indian states of Kerala and West Bengal (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001). However, participation has become difficult to measure in terms of its engagement with the poor outside periodic elections, since the extent of participation is dependent on existing social-cultural relations, and economic and power inequalities, and raises questions such as whose reality and voice matters? (Chambers, 1977). Cooke and Kothari (2001) noted how positive attributes of participation – such as knowledge-sharing, political activism, negotiating power relations – important for everyday life, can mask and reinforce existing social oppression and injustices. They argue that the language of empowerment – which participation seeks to achieve – can become tyrannical, as the empowerment procedures are illegitimate and unjust, mostly imposed from outside and above by the already powerful, leading to co-option while concealing centralising tendencies.

Decentralisation may carry an empowerment undertone: in situations where people believe their input in local governance accounts for key local decisions ‘consistent with their wishes ... they will feel better connected to local governments’ (Smoke 2003:9). Although there have been few examples in which decentralisation has increased participation (Johnson, 2001; Hadenius, 2003) in decision-making processes at the local level, there have been few or no claims of a positive correlation between decentralisation and post-war social cohesion (Scott, 2009) apart from the generic assumption that in post-war situations decentralisation can become ‘a compromise strategy to maintain the integration of secessionist groups within the state’ (Crawford and Hartmann, 2008:14). Olowu and Wunsch (2004:23) argue that decentralisation policies in most African countries are weak, sometimes without ‘legal basis and rarely accomplish their good governance promise’: instead they perpetuate regional inequalities, are prone to elite capture, and promote secession (Prud’homme, 1995; Crook, 2003; Ribot, 2004). Local councils generally tend to suffer from administrative and professional weaknesses, and are unable to attract talented bureaucrats and receive limited resources from central government. In post-war situations where the central

state's capacity is weak, central government support (administrative and financial) is most times unequal to the responsibilities devolved (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004). Economists have argued that decentralisation does not fit economies of scale and might lead to waste of vital resources (Oats, 1972).

Generally, the evidence emerging from the literature on the intrinsic value of decentralisation and its actual impact on public service delivery is inconclusive; it shows little or no direct relationship between decentralisation and improvement in public services (Conyers, 2007; Scott, 2009). Crook and Sverrisson (2001:iii) noted that, 'responsiveness to the poor' in decentralisation is a 'rare outcome', determined largely by the relationship between central and local government. In situations where a subject (here, decentralisation and theoretical conceptions of decentralisation) draws advocates from sharply different viewpoints as to their meanings interpretations and perceptions are bound to differ. However, this thesis focuses on a model of decentralisation,<sup>19</sup> mostly prescribed by donors in post-war contexts in the global south.

#### *2.1.2 Understanding Decentralisation: A Mixed Bag of Ideas?*

Decentralisation has attracted broad scholarship since the late 1980s, when it became a major component of governance and the democratic third wave (Huntington, 1991; Blair, 2000; Schou and Hauh, 2005). The term itself is still the subject of conceptual debate, largely seen and interpreted as a western construct, with little or no relevance in developing countries. It generally means political and economic 'changes which occur within political systems', especially regarding the power to generate and allocate resources at the local level (Manor 1999:4). This process of power shift does not include two other notions of decentralisation: unplanned or decentralisation by default, and privatisation, as they both lack any significant structural shift of power and resources in the planning and delivery of public services (Manor, 1999). However, it was Rondinelli's (1981) seminal thesis that provided the most generally accepted classification of decentralisation (Paker, 1995; Blair, 2000; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001; Johnson, 2001) in its present form. It includes three components: deconcentration, delegation, and devolution (Manor, 1999:5). Crawford and Hartmann (2008:9) also outlined typologies of decentralisation similar to Rondinelli's three components or classifications above. They are 'deconcentration or administrative decentralisation; fiscal decentralisation and,

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<sup>19</sup>Decentralisation is a contested discipline. The meaning associated to it in this thesis is by no means uncontested. But throughout this thesis, decentralisation will be interpreted as devolution or democratic decentralisation – see Section 2.4.

devolution or political decentralisation'. Increasingly, decentralisation is perceived as the process through which the central state formally cedes political, economic and administrative powers to lower level elected representatives, with significant authority to raise resources and deliver public services (Mawhood, 1983). Fully decentralised political systems are those in which the central states 'possess a smaller share of resources, grant more autonomy, and/or cede a higher degree of responsibility for political functions' to local authorities (Schneider, 2003:33).

Deconcentration, or administrative decentralisation, describes the transfer of authority to lower level administrative agents of central government to perform a range of responsibilities with supervision and control from the centre. The extent of authority is determined by the central state and can be altered as and when deemed fit (Mawhood, 1983). Field officials in a deconcentrated system perform their duties as regular employees of central government but working at field level. They have little obligation to consult local people – although in reality, they can seek non-binding advice from local notables. This was the model of decentralisation in Sierra Leone after the dissolution of the post-colonial local government system in 1972, as central government service delivery functions were coordinated by a District Officer (DO) who took directives from Freetown (Fanthorpe et al., 2011).

Delegation on the other hand, is the transfer of functions to public bodies created by the central state. Through this process, central government shifts responsibility for the provision of services and management of those services to a set of national institutions (such as revenue agencies, national power grids, etc.) supervised at the local level but with upward accountability to central government (Rondinelli, 1981). It must be noted that decision making in this hybrid system of central-local governance is context specific, and may differ from one context to another.

Devolution, or political decentralisation, is the transfer of political powers to democratically elected local authorities – mostly independent from central government – bounded by legal instruments in their relationship with the national government. Such a relationship gives decision-making powers to local councils, including the powers to generate and allocate resources, hire and fire personnel, and to plan and deliver services based on local priorities (Manor, 1999; Crawford and Hartmann, 2008). It is generally referred to as the ideal stage of decentralisation – as substantial authority and responsibilities are transferred to lower level elected authorities, easily accessible and,

hopefully, accountable to local people with ‘full political right’ to participation, representation and involvement in public decision-making in a pluralistic setting (Blair 2000:21). Another strand of decentralisation is fiscal decentralisation, which refers to authority over resource mobilisation and allocation (Crawford and Hartman, 2008). It includes budgetary and taxation powers through which local authorities can collect either pre-approved taxes and/or determine new ones and reallocate revenue generated based on local priorities. According to Ribot (2001:iii, in Crawford and Hartman 2008:9), fiscal decentralisation cannot be treated as a separate strand of decentralisation, as it is a ‘cross-cutting’ feature of both deconcentration and devolution. However, the level of fiscal autonomy differs between the two; there is more fiscal autonomy in a devolved, than in a deconcentrated arrangement. The recurring challenge of the decentralisation agenda is linking its promise to the service delivery reality in the countries it has been implemented (Wallis et al., 1999; Blair, 2002; Conyers, 2007). The next section attempts a stock-taking exercise, assessing the promise of decentralisation against its reality in sub-Saharan Africa.

### *2.1.3 Decentralisation: A Service Delivery Tool?*

The decentralisation trend in sub-Saharan Africa has followed a combined approach of administrative, fiscal and political devolution, and has been implemented in both democratic and authoritarian regimes (Manor, 2011). The aim is to improve public services at the local level, even where this is not explicitly stated (Conyers, 2007; Robinson 2007). However, evidence linking decentralisation and service delivery in the region is very limited (Conyers, 2007; Scott, 2009), and mostly anecdotal with limited empirical studies despite the ubiquitous nature of decentralisation and governance reform processes since the early 1990s (Wunsch, 2001; Olowu and Wunsch, 2004). Conyer’s (2007:21) comprehensive literature survey on the correlation between decentralisation and service delivery observed that decentralisation has ‘done little to improve efficiency or equity of public services’ in Africa. In Uganda – a country often cited as a devolution success story, and a familiar template for donor-led decentralisation reforms in sub-Saharan Africa – Conyer (2007) argued that decentralisation has not led to a significant transformation of public service delivery in rural communities. In a similar study, Francis and James (2003:333, in Robinson 2007:11) found that although there has been huge financial investment in Uganda’s public services like health, education, water and sanitation, decentralisation has woefully failed to improve deteriorating agricultural services for local farmers. Also, the

improvements recorded in the other sectors are due to central government conditional transfers, rather than a genuine local government investment. Azfar and Livingston (2002) found similar results in Uganda, concluding that there were no positive correlations between decentralisation, efficiency and equity in public service delivery. In Côte d'Ivoire, Crook and Sverrisson (2001:26) noted that decentralisation created new opportunities for political participation and allocative efficiency through competitive elections and local feedback mechanisms. However, in a perception survey on decentralisation and public service delivery effectiveness in Côte d'Ivoire, Crook and Sverrisson (2001:26) found that 'only 36 per cent of respondents' thought their local leaders prioritised their needs. Local mayors exerted tremendous authority such that participation by local people and responsiveness from leaders became a mockery. Where people preferred 'roads, social services and water supplies' their communes 'built "town halls" and secondary schools' (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001:26). Similar evidence was found in Tanzania by Fjeldstad (2001:294, in Conyers 2007:21) where two-thirds of respondents in two local communities labelled council services as 'bad', while in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire (Crook and Manor, 1998: 186- 255) 70 and 54% respectively, of respondents in a perception survey considered their elected local authorities unable to meet community needs.

While decentralisation is generally associated with increased public spending in specific sectors, higher public spending does not necessarily result in better outcomes in public service delivery (Estache and Sinha, 1995; Mandl et al., 2008; Mays and Smith, 2011). Using a technique in productive theory, Gupta and Verhoeven (2001:461) analysed the efficiency spending in the health and education sectors in Africa, Asia and the Western Hemisphere. Their results were diverse and largely contradicted the service delivery promise of decentralisation. In Africa, the Gambia, Guinea, Ethiopia and Lesotho had relatively high educational attainment and health output, whilst Botswana, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya reported low educational attainment and health outputs. Apart from the variation between countries in Africa in terms of their output, the continent also performed poorly relative to the other two regions in the study. Acknowledging that such studies are by themselves not conclusive in terms of the increased spending in local services and improved output, they do undoubtedly unmask the limitations of meta-narratives such as decentralisation, and its impact on increased spending, allocative and productive efficiency and improvement in local public services. According to a World Bank (2004) study, per capita health spending declined to a record low in the two

decades from the 1980s to 1990s in Côte d'Ivoire. However, in a similar context – in Haiti, where health spending per capita increased around the same time – different results were recorded: while infant mortality rates increased in Côte d'Ivoire they substantially decreased in Haiti.

Unlike most sub-Saharan African countries where decentralisation initiatives were implemented as part of the good governance agenda (World Bank, 1989; Leftwich 1994), in Latin America and Asia – especially in India, Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil – decentralisation (whatever its form), had been in practice before the late 1980s (Rondinelli 1981). In India, for instance, some form of decentralisation was initiated in the 1950s as part of Gandhi's socialist movement and in recent times, decentralisation in states like Kerala and West Bengal led to affirmative action being instituted to provide mandatory participation and empowerment through reserved seats for women, Scheduled Castes and other disadvantaged groups in the local government system of Kerala and West Bengal (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001). Among the few positive cases of decentralisation in Africa was Côte d'Ivoire before its political conflict in early 2000. The introduction of decentralisation and subsequent local elections provided some degree of accountability in local public service delivery. In the local council elections in the 1990s, electorates passed a vote of no confidence in a sizable number of its local leaders, with '50 per cent of all mayors changed in 1990, and 37 per cent in [the] 1996' local election respectively (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001:26).

In a number of cases, decentralisation has enhanced quality and equity in public service delivery. Following the concept of allocative efficiency,<sup>20</sup> Faguet's (2004) study of decentralisation in Bolivia found that investment in human capital and social services changed significantly after the introduction of decentralisation in the early 1990s, and those changes strongly and positively correlate with locally identified needs. Huther and Shah (1996) and Enikolopov and Zhuravskaya (2003) used cross-section time series to analyse data for a large number of countries in Asia and Africa and found that, in an overall assessment, decentralisation contributed to improved service delivery. They also, however, noted the variation in improvement among sectors and between countries and regions. Andrew and Schroeder (2003), using evidence from the World Bank (1994:74-8), argued that devolution of road maintenance to local councils could improve both the speed and quality of roadworks. However, as Casey (2009) argued, one of the worst

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<sup>20</sup> Originally developed and popularised by Tibout (1956); denoting the delivery of public service consistent with the local needs.

performing sectors in the decentralisation process in Sierra Leone is road maintenance, where the national roads authority has been lacklustre in decentralising the maintenance of feeder roads to local councils, arguing that road maintenance requires high technical engineering expertise which is currently not available in the councils. Thus far, there appears to be a mixed bag of evidence on the impact of decentralisation in improving both allocative and productive efficiency, the quality of public service and local participation in the planning and delivery of such service. In sub-Saharan Africa, the evidence is even more unclear and uncertain due to the limited number of empirical studies.

## **2.2 Decentralisation and Social Cohesion: An Uncharted Territory**

Social cohesion as a tool for the promotion of good governance and sustainable peace and development has gained traction since the late 1980s, both within mainstream development practice, and across bilateral development aid (King et al., 2010). A number of studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between measures of social cohesion and development outcomes (Ritzen et al., 2000; World Bank, 2005; Easterly et al., 2006; Ferroni et al., 2008; Hayami, 2009). Based on some of these research findings, the promotion of social cohesion in governance reform initiatives in post-war development interventions- especially in the global south – seems to be in line with a global consensus that ‘social cohesion provides the foundation for growth and development’ (King et al., 2010:336). For instance, the Copenhagen Declaration of 1995 on Social Development positioned social cohesion, alongside other social norms and values such as equity and justice, as important components of global development intervention – especially in developing and heterogeneous societies (United Nations, 1995). This global positioning of social cohesion in development and peacebuilding interventions explains, in part, the establishment of a Social Development Department within the World Bank with a commitment to promote social cohesion improvement and post-war reconstruction and peacebuilding alongside sustainable economic growth in developing and post-conflict countries.

This global focus on social cohesion as an instrument for economic growth and post-war peacebuilding, significantly contributed to the development and role of economic development, governance reform and peacebuilding initiatives in post-war developing countries, with social cohesion as the guiding strategy (King et al., 2010). Such a development strategy has, in part, been promoted by development theories and

frameworks which argue that social cohesion is an important part of economic growth, inclusive institutional and livelihoods development (Sen, 1999; Woolcock and Narayan, 1999; Chang, 2002; World Bank 2005). But despite this global consensus on the nexus between social cohesion and development outcomes, huge disagreements persist on ‘whether social cohesion is a cause or a consequence of other aspects of social, economic and political life’ not the least on what social cohesion itself means (Beauvais and Johnson, 2002:5).

Social cohesion theories are as old as the social science discipline itself. As Soroka et al. (2007:566-567) argued, a major preoccupation of Émile Durkheim’s academic research in the 1880s was an attempt to provide an answer to the challenging question facing the discipline of sociology: ‘What are the bonds which unite men with another?’ Three distinct, yet interrelated answers to Durkheim’s question have been the focus of analysis in the social sciences tradition. The first answer emphasises a common set of features, values and norms of social cohesion dubbed by Durkheim the ‘collective conscience’ of humanity, critical for collective action and sacrifice for the common good (Soroka et al., 2007:566-7). The second answer moved away from common values, instead emphasising community-wide engagement and participation as the cornerstone for social cohesion, and focused on questions about how people can live together, instead of who they are, or what differentiates them. Inclusive communities that participate and collaborate together in solving common problems and support each other during moments of need, and with effective conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution institutions are considered socially cohesive. The third equates social cohesion with social capital – the networks and norms of trust and interaction which hold society together (Soroka et al., 2007). From this analysis therefore, the key features to look out for in determining social cohesion in a community are productive social capital measured by strong social bonds and trust, inclusive, supportive and participatory communities and, last but not least, what Durkheim referred to as the ‘collective conscience’ of humanity which emphasises sacrifice for the common good over selfish personal gain and satisfaction.

A study commissioned by the World Bank’s social development department defines social cohesion as:

The absence of latent conflict whether in the form of income inequality; ethnic tensions; disparities in political participation; or other forms of polarization; and) the presence of strong social

bonds—measured by levels of trust and norms of reciprocity; the abundance of associations that bridge social divisions...and the presence of institutions of conflict management. (Colletta and Cullen 2000:4)

The Bank's definition represents two dimensions and dual interpretations of social cohesion – vertical and horizontal social cohesion. Vertical social cohesion demonstrates the degree of the central state's responsiveness and ability to resolve disputes among its citizens, especially the establishment and effective functioning of conflict prevention and mitigation structures, while horizontal social cohesion embodies the strength of associations, networks and bonds between and among people. Stronger bonds of civic interaction and effective institutions of dispute prevention and resolution account for inclusive societies that are socially cohesive, and capable of preventing and mediating conflict. The absence of vertical and horizontal social cohesion 'increases the risk of social disorganisation, fragmentation and exclusion...and violent conflict' (Colletta and Cullen 2000:4). Therefore, the focus of social cohesion is on respect and promotion of trust, rights, equality and freedoms of individuals in their communities with mechanism to prevent, mitigate and resolve disputes among people.

In addition to the challenges of defining social cohesion, agreement has yet to be reached on what is an acceptable *measure* of social cohesion, despite the fact that a number of attempts have been made to do so with a focus on a number of key variables such the rate of membership in organisations and civic participation in communal activities (Easterly et al., 2006). Narayan and Pritchett, (1999) for instance, have measured at the micro level, civic participation and rates of organisation membership with significant impact on income levels and cooperation among people in rural locations. Similar studies have also been carried out by Robert Putnam and his associates (Putman, 1993; Helliwell and Putnam, 1995) with positive correlation between membership in organisations and improved levels of social cohesion at the regional level.

Another social cohesion variable is measures of 'trust'. Knack and Keefer (1995, 1997) have carried out useful research on trust levels as a measure of social cohesion, especially with an attempt to provide an aggregate answer to the World Value Survey question: "Do you think people can be trusted?" Their studies find somewhat positive correlation between trust levels and levels of social cohesion. However, data from the

World Values Survey indicate that trust levels are ‘typically high in the richer countries (rates are around 50%) and low in developing countries’ (Easterly et al., 2006:109).

The relationship between decentralisation and social cohesion remains ‘unexplored territory’ (Scott 2009:14) in decentralisation initiatives in the developing world. There is little research that particularly deals with the impact, correlation and/or causal mechanisms through which decentralisation can account for socially cohesive society or its opposite outcome, even though a number of countries have implemented decentralisation initiatives as part of post-war peace building initiatives (Brinkerhoff and Donald, 2009; Fanthorpe et al., 2011). However, there is a growing body of literature on decentralisation and ethnicity, religious and ethnic minorities and social polarisation (Tadros, 2012). There is also substantial literature on decentralisation and violent conflicts (Brinkerhoff and Mayfield, 2005; Schou and Haugh, 2005; Green, 2008) and a large body of literature on social capital as the building block for social cohesion, especially from the OECD (Fine, 2001; Fine and Lapavitsas, 2004; Cox, 2009; Jenson 2010). This thesis, therefore, combines the general literature on social cohesion and the limited one on decentralisation and violent conflicts, on the assumption that conflict and/or civil war within a state, can lead to total breakdown or ‘weakens’ a state’s ‘social fabric’ (Colletta and Cullen 2000:1). By doing so, the research seeks to hold a conversation between the decentralisation and social cohesion literatures which have largely evolved in isolation. The focus here is to set out the key features and dimensions of social cohesion to look out for in a socially cohesive society, the role of ethnic homogeneity and heterogeneity in enhancing social cohesion in sub-Saharan Africa and how decentralisation may support or hinder processes of social cohesion.

According to Easterly et al., (2006:103), a country’s social cohesion is essential for generating the confidence and patience needed to implement reforms, and in ethnically diverse communities such as in sub-Saharan Africa, post-war governance and institutional reform initiatives are more successful when the composition of public institutions is inclusive of ethnic diversity as this can greatly help strengthen social cohesion. In non-homogenous societies divided by along ethnic lines, however, it ‘place[s] severe constraints on the attempts of even the boldest, civic-minded, and well-informed politician (or interest group) seeking to bring about policy reform’ (Easterly, et al., 2006:103). It suggests therefore that successful governance reform programmes such as decentralisation will be more successful in ethnically homogenous societies than

in ethnically diverse societies. As Miguel and Gugerty (2005:2325-6) argued, 'ethnically diverse societies have slower economic growth and are more prone to corruption and economic instability than ethnically homogenous societies as a result of political conflict across ethnic groups'. In their study on ethnic diversity, social cohesion and public service delivery in Kyan, Miguel and Gugerty (2005) found a strong correlation between ethnic diversity and lower levels of school funding and the quality of facilities in public schools.

However, the relationship and causal mechanisms between decentralisation and levels of social cohesion are neither straightforward nor obvious, and therefore should not be assumed. Decentralisation and social cohesion – especially the manner in which social capital is integrated in a holistic programme of local governance – can have reciprocal relationships: social capital can bring communities together for peace as much as for violence (Jenson, 2010). Social capital – the foundation of social cohesion – is also prone to negative as well as positive consequences (Fine, 2001). It has immense positive contributions to the 'short-term stability of a society experiencing political involution as well as emancipatory consequences', but can also be used as a mobilising tool for violent action in fractured communities (Richards et al., 2004:iv). Therefore, 'legal and political reforms in decentralisation as causal mechanisms between decentralisation and social cohesion are not enough; the rural poor need practical opportunities to acquire and exercise their rights' and participate actively in the planning and delivery of local services within a context with strong, impartial and accessible conflict mitigation and resolution institutions (Richards et al., 2004:iv). Tandros (2013) analysed the impact of decentralisation in religiously heterogeneous societies in Egypt after the Mubarak era and discovered that violence against Christians increased when conflict resolution powers were devolved from the central legal system to local community leaders. 'Devolution of power, if not followed by measures to ensure inclusive politics', Tandros (2013:3) noted, 'may undermine social cohesion and increase violence against minorities'.

There is still much uncertainty regarding the extent to which decentralisation promotes social cohesion, especially in post-conflict states, because inequality and exclusion masked by decentralisation processes can keep minorities on the margins of society, rather than strengthen their rights and involvement. It is fallacious to think that all local government systems are naturally in favour of more cohesive and peaceful communities,

and are willing to actively and meaningfully involve local people in the planning and delivery of local public services. The causal mechanisms and extent to which decentralisation may account for an increase in social cohesion hinges on how decentralised local authorities use available resources to support collective societal actions and how social capital and local institutions of conflict prevention and mitigation are integrated into a holistic decentralised local government system (Klem and Frerks, 2008). In Rwanda, for instance, participants in a violence and social cohesion survey noted that whilst ‘trust, solidarity, civic duty, protection of the vulnerable, and a just political system’ are key elements of social cohesion, these features were eroded not necessarily by the genocide, but by other externalities such as economic growth, monetisation and urbanisation of the state (Colleta and Cullen 2000:9). Therefore, strong social bonds are a matrix of social cohesion measured by the capacity of the group to model and control the behaviour of its members (Boone, 2003).

Khan and Munir (2006:1-2) argued that decentralised authorities cannot manufacture social cohesion in the same way as they can provide jobs or improve services, but they can mobilise and redirect ‘civic culture’ by encouraging interaction among people and local councils, supporting grassroots community associations, making people more involved in community programmes and ‘supporting them when they do’. Therefore, for decentralisation to contribute to increased levels of social cohesion, decentralised local councils need to be consultative in their service delivery planning and support processes that bring people of diverse backgrounds together and integrate traditional and formal justice and conflict resolution mechanisms into a holistic decentralised local government system (Boone, 2003; Khan and Munir, 2006). Where this is the opposite, especially where ethnicity is instrumentalised for the purposes of vote gathering, decentralisation may become antithetical to social cohesion.

Understanding social cohesion requires a thorough understanding of social capital – a public good expected to be a neutral resource that ‘facilitates collective action’ (Micolta 2009:75) and helps shape ‘relationships and social forces’ (Naraya 2002, in Moore 2009:126). As Zetter et al. (2006:22) noted, ‘social capital is in some sense the practical tool to achieve social cohesion’. Social capital determines the degree of integration (embeddedness) and autonomy – ‘the levels of exclusivity and universality’, and the ability to build networks and access resources outside one’s family and other primary groups of socialisation (Moore 2009:127). Woolcock’s (1998, in Moore 2009:128) model

allows for the analysis and measurement of social capital within communities where decentralisation initiatives have been implemented.

**Table 1: Integration and Autonomy as Social Capital Variables**

<i>Integration/Embeddedness</i>	<i>Level of Autonomy</i>	
	Low	High
Low	Amoral Individualism	Anomie
High	Amoral Familism	Social Opportunity

Source: Woolcock (1998), in Moore (2009:128)

According to Moore (2009:128), integration demonstrates ‘intra-community bonding’ between members of the same community (family, clan, etc.) – developed through group solidarity and trust. Autonomy, or bridging, on the other hand, refers to linkages from ‘primary groups with intra- and inter-community networks’ (Moore 2009:128). The combination of integration and autonomy produces four interrelated characteristics of social capital that influence the level of social cohesion in society. Therefore, more integration and higher levels of autonomy lead to the social opportunity needed for community development.

Equally, a lower degree of integration and lower levels of networks account for amoral individualism – each person for him or herself. However, a high level of autonomy with a low degree of integration generates a condition of anomie – where people relate extensively with external networks but with little intra-community bonding. The fourth and final characteristic is amoral familism – generated by a high degree of local integration with low levels of external linkages. These characteristics of social capital, Moore (2009) argues, provide the conceptual framework for an effective analysis of decentralisation and social cohesion. Society needs different skills and inputs towards a shared sense of purpose and community. And, as Turkor (2006:355, in Jenson 2010:14) suggests, strong social relations, family bonds and linkages with an active civil society contribute to a society’s economic growth. Such a collective whole may ‘limit selfish practices, conflict and instability, and generally improve the durability of economic relationships’.

Given that social capital can be both productive and counterproductive to social cohesion, how decentralisation enhances the positive utility of social capital and builds a socially cohesive society in developing countries is an on-going debate. Ethnicity has been suggested as a major factor in determining social cohesion in a decentralised local

government system (Easterly et al., 2006). Also, the usual configuration of local council entities alongside already established ethno-political boundaries – such as the local councils in Sierra Leone – raises questions as to the extent to which social opportunity, higher degrees of autonomy and integration can be achieved when communities are already compartmentalised along geo-ethnic lines and political alliances.

### **2.3 Theoretical Framework: The Basis of Analysis**

This thesis is a product of the rigorous application of political economy analysis: a process Lockwood (2005:2) refers to as a ‘systematic attempt to model the behaviour of government’ by assessing the actors, institutions and processes ‘that determine the choice of fiscal policies in practice’. Political economy analysis focuses on ‘how different political processes and institutions might shape the fiscal choices’ of politicians and public bureaucrats (Ponce-Rodriguez et al., 2011:4). It analyses the social individual, and attempts to provide answers as to why collective – as opposed to individual – action takes place by studying a particular context, its actors and socio-political networks of relationships and intersections, with a critical focus on processes and relations. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), political economy deals with ‘the interaction of political and economic processes in a society, the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time’ (Collinson, 2003:3).

In recent years, PE analyses have been taken on board by development agencies to inform and shape their interventions (Williams et al., 2007; World Bank, 2009; Copestake and Williams, 2012) in many parts of the developing world. They emphasise the incorporation of historical and socio-ethnic variables in analysing power relations and resource variations within society. Political economy analysis also deals with economic activities, policies and processes that ‘generate wealth and influence political choices’ (DfID 2009:4) and pays attention to politics – a process and product of contestation, self-determination and ‘competing claims over rights and resources’ (Pierre and Peter, 2000; Johnson 2001:523). In its White Paper, ‘Building Our Common Future’, DfID (2009:73) emphasises the importance of political economy analyses in its development intervention:

We need to understand who holds power in society so we can forge new alliances. In the future; understanding political dynamics will shape

more of our programmes. This will change the decisions we make about how we spend our aid budget...and who we want to work with.

Decentralisation has, in the last three decades, gained traction for its allocative efficiency or preference matching (the provision of local public services by local authorities, in conformity with local needs and priorities) promise and increased accountability (the extent to which corruption and other rent-seeking behaviours of governments are checked) (Ribot, 2004; Willis et al., 1999). According to Lockwood (2005:3), the 'standard approach' that excludes political economy considerations in decentralisation analyses is inadequate to understand the benefits of allocative efficiency and accountability; and only a thorough political economy approach can give an accurate account of allocative efficiency and accountability in a 'manner that is both rigorous and plausible'. Central to Lockwood's argument is the work of Rondinelli et al. (1989:59), which proposes a multidisciplinary framework that incorporates two approaches: public choice theory and public policy approaches. Public choice theory deals with the science of political decision making and how public policies are explained, based on economic rationality (Cramer, 2002). Its underlying assumption hinges on a cost-benefit analysis, suggesting that people are rational actors, capable of pursuing economic self-interest, willing and able to make optimal choices (Rondinelli et al., 1989; Hirshleifer, 1994; Cramer, 2002). On the other hand, public policy goes beyond the economic lens; it uses a broader context that accounts for 'political, behavioural, administrative and social factors that affect policy formulation and implementation' (Rondinelli et al., 1989:61-62). For effective decentralisation intervention, the two should be integrated into a systematic and comprehensive political economy framework that includes: an analysis of goods and services and their users; planning and financing of services; institutional arrangements for service delivery; and, socio-economic and political conditions affecting policy design and implementation (Rondinelli et al., 1989).

Despite decades of dominance as a donor-led governance reform strategy in the developing world, empirical evidence linking decentralisation and improvement in service delivery has, at best, remained mixed and at worst, negative (Conyers, 2007). At the core of such mixed outcomes is the relationship between policy objectives of decentralisation, the evolving policy priorities of donors and national bureaucrats and politicians, whose motivations remain non-monolithic (Blair 2000). As Eaton et al. (2010:xi) argued, the focus of most decentralisation programmes in developing countries is prioritised around technical requirements for achieving 'normatively

desirable objectives'. Unfortunately, such 'technical insulations' (World Bank, 1993:167) have failed to identify and incorporate the socio-cultural and political agencies that drive reform in different contexts.

Following a Foucauldian notion of power, Keen (1994:12) argues in his seminal thesis on the benefits of famine in the Sudan, that understanding the local forces that shaped famine and relief intervention requires a critical examination of power and its uses, 'avoiding the simplistic assumption that power is possessed and manipulated by a unitary body called the state'. Famine is often portrayed as a natural occurrence, political failure, a function of market forces or a weapon of war, 'ignoring the possibility that, there may be beneficiaries' (Keen, 1994:52). However, famine is more than a war weapon, as it accounts for both winners and losers. On the political economy of conflicts, Keen (1998:9, 2003) suggests that there is need for a better understanding of the forces that ignite and sustain conflicts. The intractability of violent conflicts in countries such as Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, calls for a deeper understanding of the socio-political complexities underpinning them.

Violence has both economic and political benefits; therefore, traditional narratives of civil wars as 'political and military struggles' that 'emphasise tactics rather than political economy' are no longer tenable (Keen 1998:15). Pillage, Keen (2008:8) argues, has been used in wars to replace official wages for the military in countries like Congo and the Central Africa Republic, and access to lootable resources has fuelled war economies, propped-up 'abusive regimes' and masked the failure of the international community (Keen 2008:8). Writing on Sierra Leone's civil war, Keen (2005:107; 2008:58) shows how the various factions in the conflict colluded in exploiting the country's resources. There were limited direct battles between adversaries in the war, he argues, and open evidence of collusion in which the national army was selling weapons to the rebels – a phenomenon that led to narratives such as sell game – 'collusion between ostensibly rival parties' and *sobel*s – 'soldiers by day and rebels by night'. Mbembe (2001:50) neatly summarises this genre of argument when he suggests that war economies have changed from those with weapons fighting each other, as it 'is more likely to imply a conflict between those who have weapons and those who have none'.

In decentralisation, as in famine and civil wars, there are both winners and losers. Finding out how decentralisation reforms are designed and implemented and how they

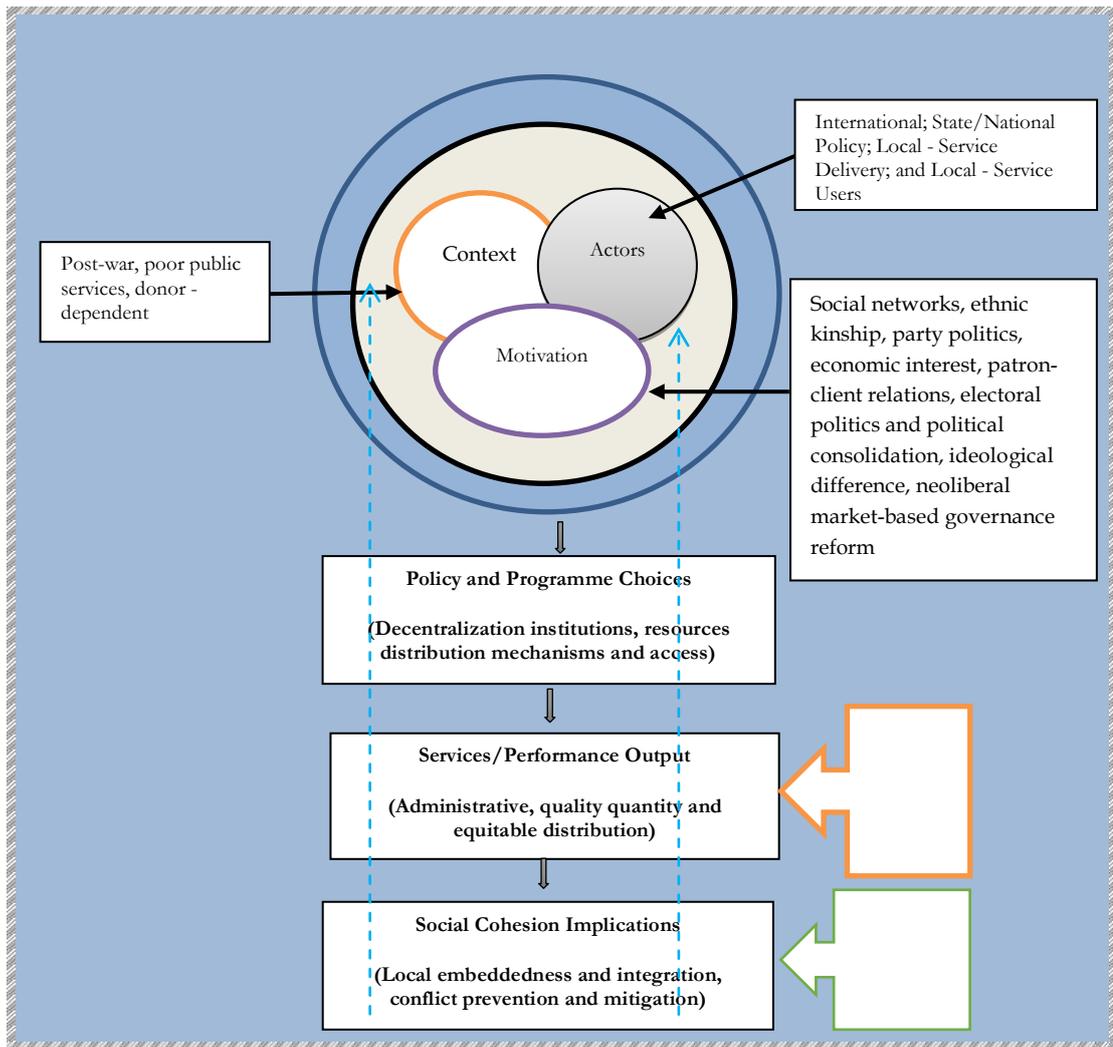
contribute to public service delivery and social cohesion, requires an understanding of the context and the underlying motivations of actors.

Building on Keen's (1994; 1998; 2003; 2005) political economy of famine and conflict analysis, and taking it further on democratic decentralisation in Sierra Leone, the thesis invites decentralisation advocates – especially those who view it as a process of technical and economic efficiency – to be sceptical of such narratives, and to see decentralisation as both an economic and socio-political process requiring socio-political and economic considerations, and to move away from donor-led institutional non-compliance terminologies of 'corruption', 'lack of transparency and capacity', to 'the purposeful strategies of rulers', interest and choices of politicians and public sector bureaucrats (Marriage, 2013:21). As Pierre and Peter (2000:51) succinctly summarise this discourse, the state and its actions could not be 'understood without understanding its political economy and its civil society' and those who perceive decentralisation as technocratic, and politics as an 'oddity, a constraint, or something to be overcome, contained or even excluded', will fail, as socio-political considerations remain central to decentralisation in its formulation, implementation and outcome.

The increased adoption of political economy analysis by international donors<sup>21</sup> is a growing recognition that previous policy prescriptions have failed to deliver reform (Eaton et al., 2010). Landel-Mills et al. (2007:1) argued that, while donor-led political economy approaches such as DfID's 'Drivers of Change' and the World Bank's 'Problem-Driven Governance and Political Economy and Institutional and Governance Review' have sought to create a better understanding of the contextual power relations in developing countries, they generally remain inadequate and need to be taken further, beyond the identification of the influential actors that donors seek to work with. Instead, Landel-Mills et al., (2007:2) proposed an extended version of political economy analysis called 'New Political Economy Perspective' (NPEP). The approach combines strongly embedded socio-cultural 'beliefs, traditional norms and ethnicity, which change only gradually, and yet have a profound influence on the way agents act and react'. This study takes a leaf from this approach of critical political economy analysis.

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<sup>21</sup> Despite the limitations of donor-led Political Economy approaches.



**Figure 2: Political economy analytical framework**

Source: designed by the author

The choice of data collection techniques, triangulation and analysis was informed by the theoretical framework which is rooted in the basis of long-term understanding and analysis of the changing dynamics and intersections of context, actors and motivations within the realm of a complex network of ethno-political, social and kinship relations. Therefore, the triangulation of data in the analysis process is important in this case, as multiple data collection methods were used (Merriam, 1998; Picciano, 2006) to generate information across different sites on similar issues. As Richards (2005) argues, reliability and internal validity can be built in qualitative research when multiple sources of data collection are used and triangulated, thus enhancing the researcher's ability to cross-check findings and guarantee reliability and the possibility of generalisation. As Figure 2 indicates, actors interact with the context in which they operate, which in turn generates a set of motivations influenced by a number of socio-economic and political considerations – ranging from ethnic kinship to patron-client politics and neoliberal

market-based service delivery modes – which then informs the kinds of decentralisation policies, institutional arrangement and programme choices, setting the trajectory for resource access and service delivery and performance outputs – with significant implications for the modes of social interaction, conflict prevention and mitigation, and overall social cohesion levels. In a cyclical manner, levels of social cohesion are critical in determining the overall decentralisation landscape and the political economy context that influence actor motivation and public policy decision making.

#### **2.4 Neoliberal Institutionalism International versus National Interests**

There has been a broadening of concepts associated with international support towards post-war governance reform in developing countries (Crawford and Hartmann, 2008:21-23). Building cohesive societies and strengthening state capacity to deliver core functions after violent conflicts goes beyond bringing former adversaries to the negotiating table. It includes among other things, addressing the causes of the conflict, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former fighters, security and governance reform, which constitute some of the core components of the ‘state building’ agenda in the developing world (Keen, 2003; Fukuyama, 2004; Woodward, 2011). Therefore, governance reform via state building can be one of the most profound external interventions in post-war communities (Leftwich, 1884; Ponce-Rodriguez, 2011; Marriage, 2013). By 1996, the World Bank’s researchers had already developed global development indicators, largely based on institutional economics (Woodward, 2011) or what Marriage (2013:20) refers to ‘institutional compliance’ – to measure governance and economic development outcomes.

While post-war reconciliation and social cohesion requires tremendous support to the central state to establish control and legitimacy across the country, decentralisation is often seen as a way of reducing the powers of the centralised state without reference to national politics (Call and Cook, 2003). As Kelsal (2008) argues, the state in many African countries is not yet fully formalised relative to western notions of statehood. Therefore, governance, social cohesion and solving collective community problems, are still largely conducted through informal agencies such as family and ethnic kinship. Such patterns of public sector administration sit directly opposite western notions of governance and democratic decentralisation which are based on a Weberian definition of statehood which divests powers to semi-autonomous agencies with a full degree of legitimacy, autonomy and non-coercive capacity to deliver crucial public services. In

post-war developing countries like Sierra Leone, political power and the distribution of development interventions are still largely dependent on traditional patriarchy and rural gerontocracy in the countryside, which is not fully integrated into the decentralisation dispensation (Casey et al., 2012; Keen, 2003). Reno (1995) characterises this primitive mode of power accumulation and development as the indivisible hand of the ‘shadow state’, where formality is seen as desirable; but informality pervades. In *War Lord Politics in African States*, Reno (1998:5) wrote:

My definition of state borrows from Max Weber’s observation that states vary in their degree of resemblance to an ideal type in which they enforce regulations backed up with a monopoly of violence. I find throughout the four case studies that the exercise of political authority in these countries [Liberia, Sierra Leone, DRC and Nigeria] represent nearly the opposite of the Weberian ideal.

In what was expected to be the era of a new dawn with the ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama, 1992) after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the terrorist attacks in the United States of America in September 11, 2001(9/11), saw the increased association of under-development and security (Fukuyama, 2004; Duffield, 2005). State building, in these Western-labelled fragile states, became the cornerstone of the global good governance and securitisation agendas in the so-called ‘war on terror’ (Roberts, 2005), leading to a new kind of imperialism defined by effective states in the Global South, ‘attuned to cosmopolitan values’ of democratic elections and free markets (Cooper, 2002:17 in Duffield, 2005:144; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). The motivation for the creation of what Mayall and de Oliveira (2011:2) referred to as new protectorates ‘was a complex mix of ideological commitment to implant and nurture liberal institutions, self-styled altruism, and security-inspired concerns which predates, but were catalysed by the events of September 11, 2001’. And as Steger and Roy (2010:121) argue, ‘President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair turned the security crisis affecting the world into an opportunity for extending the hegemony of neoliberalism on new terms’. This clash of paradigms between local preferences to governance and western neoliberal principles of state building and democratic governance reform (Steger and Roy, 2010) brings to question how post-war governance in Africa should be redirected to ensure it does not go against the ‘grain’ (Kelsall 2008:1). As Leftwich (1994:364) argues, decentralisation is almost always considered ‘an autonomous administrative capacity, detached from the turbulent world of politics and the structure and purpose of the state’. This technocratic illusion of governance reform and development, is both naïve and simplistic.

However, in most circumstances, the creation of western-styled institutions of governance does not reflect local preferences. Quite often, external actors can quickly consider local governance reform as a replacement for undemocratic local modes of power structures and the introduction of neoliberal bureaucratic institutions – seen as ‘politically free and economically open’, are economically liberalised and advanced, and considered to pose less threat to global security (Mayall and de Oliveira, 2011:12). According to Stieglitz (1998), post-war governance reform represents a significant paradigm shift aimed at societal transformation. Therefore, the continuity of primitive and traditional modes of governance demonstrates a development failure. However, governance reform interventions conducted under the emblem of state building conflates a state’s inability to perform core public service delivery functions with neo-patrimonialism, armed conflict and state failure in the global south (Zartman, 1995). The fallacy of such assumptions, Wai (2012) argues, begs the question about when exactly a state is considered to have failed and what is the relationship between state failure – the source of multiple pathologies that could, if unchecked, engulf the global economy (Mayall and de Oliveira, 2011:12) – and state formation?

Bush (2003) has expressed caution about the enthusiasm for decentralisation or anything that seeks to reduce the powers of the central state; such a decision has the potential to affect power dynamics, sustainability of intervention and the process of social cohesion in rural communities. Successful decentralisation processes are those that integrate institutional strengthening with socio-cultural agencies through which political legitimacy and political authority interact (Hohe, 2002; Landel-Mills et al., 2007). As Boone (1998: 25, in Crook and Sverrisson, 2001:2) argued in her analysis of governance reform and state building interventions in West Africa, ‘decentralization cannot be treated as a technically neutral device which can be implemented without constraints, as if there were no pre-existing social context’: the central state ‘may have important stakes in established powerbrokers and in established, local-level social and political hierarchies that can extend beyond the reach of the state’.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the thesis has argued that the study of theories provides critical analytical tools that bring coherence and systematic organisation to the collection and analysis of data. The chapter analysed the fluid and complex concept of decentralisation, its meaning and characteristics, intrinsic values, motives and promise (theory) against

the evidence and/or reality in sub-Saharan Africa. Following this analysis, the chapter explored the uncharted territory of social cohesion as a product of decentralisation. Highlighting the lack of empirical research and links between decentralisation and social cohesion, the chapter argues that social capital can produce contradictory outcomes, i.e. positive or negative, in decentralised local government systems. The chapter explored, in detail, the theory of political economy, its evolution, the choice of political economy analysis, and relevance in relation to the thesis's central research question. It also shed light on the political economy of democratic decentralisation in the developing world, with an analytic focus on sub-Saharan Africa – a continent which has had a plethora of decentralisation interventions, but limited empirical political economy analysis.

The last section links the politics of the western-led neoliberal state building argument that when decentralisation interventions are modelled under the guise of a neoliberal project without context, they run the risk of pushing for institutional compliance, whilst ignoring contextual considerations.

## Chapter Three

### Sierra Leone - A History of Dictatorship, War, Peace And Governance Reform

#### 3.0 Introduction

When Sierra Leone emerged from its decade-long civil war in 2002,<sup>22</sup> the country was ranked at the bottom of the UN Human Development Index and faced a multiplicity of governance, security, economic and infrastructural development challenges.<sup>23</sup> Over three decades of centralisation following the dissolution of the post-colonial local government system in 1972 and the introduction of one party rule in 1978 deepened the exclusion and marginalisation of large sections of society and provided the conditions for the country's civil war from 1991 to 2002 (Truth and Reconciliation Report, 2004; Hanlon, 2005; Jackson, 2005; Keen, 2005). Early commitments by the Sierra Leone People's Party-led government to governance reform were squeezed by immediate security concerns such as the reform and stabilisation of the security sector and the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants. However, a combination of national and international pressure on the government brought to the fore renewed commitment to a politically legitimate local government system by early 2004 (Conteh, 2014). With technical and financial support from the international community, the Local Government Act (LGA) was promulgated in March 2004, followed by local council elections, two months later. The Act, among other things, provides for the [re]establishment of 19 district, municipal and city councils, and set forth the regulatory framework for the political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation, thus ending over three decades of centralised governance (Gaima, 2009).

In order to roll out the devolution of functions, the third schedule to the Act – Statutory Instrument No 13 (Local Government Assumption of Functions) – outlined a set of 80 functions to be devolved through a transitional phase between 2004 and 2008. Over a decade down the decentralisation pathway, a system of local government has been set in motion – with the provision of core local human resources, office space, equipment and extensive training – after three successful local council elections in 2004, 2008 and 2012. Despite delays in the devolution of functions, 56 out of the 80 functions

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<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Richards, 1996; Abdullah 2004, Gberie, 2005; Keen, 2005.

<sup>23</sup> UN Human Development Index Report 2002.

slated for devolution have either been partly or fully devolved (Zhou, 2009; Srivastava and Larizza, 2011).

This chapter sets the stage for understanding the socio-political and economic context and motivations under which decentralisation reforms were conceived and implemented, and partly addresses the thesis's first sub-research question regarding the nature and progress of Sierra Leone's post-war decentralisation trajectory. Based mostly on secondary data and few field-based interviews, the chapter discusses and analyses the evolution, model, actors and motivations of Sierra Leone's decentralisation initiative within the context of a post-war, externally-led neoliberal state building agenda. It begins with an analysis of the country's post-independence governance regime, and discusses the relationship between centralisation, dictatorship and conflict. It explores the evolution of post-war decentralisation reforms, including its key drivers and motivations. Following this evolutionary trajectory, the chapter discusses the legal basis of the LGA, including its political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation provisions, the structure of the decentralisation programme, its actors, institutions, human resources and general devolution progress. The last section summarises overall progress whilst highlighting some of the ambiguities, compromises and limitations of the legal instrument.

Over a decade (2004-2014) down the decentralisation pathway, this chapter argues that whilst reasonable progress has been made in Sierra Leone's decentralisation initiative – in terms of the quantity of public service delivery facilities and their users – considering the centralised nature of the state before 2004, huge lapses, inconsistencies and ambiguities persist in Sierra Leone's governance reform project, in addition to the fact that the country's decentralisation model lacks complementarity with other national public service delivery legislations. These ambiguities, the chapter suggests, are largely a product of a complex patchwork of actor motivations and the fragile nature of the post-war state in which devolution was conceived and implemented.

### **3.1 The Post-Independence State in Sierra Leone: War, Peace and Governance Reform**

This section is by no means a historical analysis of Sierra Leone's post-colonial governance architecture and its potential contribution to the country's civil war. To set forth such an analysis would require sufficient details and nuance, which is outside the remit of this study. The section's aim is very modest: to provide a rough indication of

some of the key features of post-colonial governance and the outbreak of the civil war in Sierra Leone, in order to provide a fairly accurate background against which post-war governance reforms were initiated.

A British colony from 1808 to 1961, Sierra Leone is situated along the Mano River basin, bordered on its north-western coast by the Republic of Guinea, and on its south-eastern flank by the Republic of Liberia. With a recent population estimate of about seven million people<sup>24</sup> and 71,740 square kilometres of land area, Sierra Leone's capital – Freetown – was founded in 1787 as a settlement for freed slaves by British explorers who took possession of its coastal area and declared Freetown a colony in 1808, while the surrounding hinterland was granted protectorate status in 1894 (Fyfe, 1967). After over 150 years of British colonial rule, Sierra Leone was granted independence on 27 April 1961, and joined the international community as the 100<sup>th</sup> member of the United Nations (Alie, 1990).

Infamous for its brutal civil war (from 1991-2002) and so-called blood diamonds, corruption and political mismanagement, a succession of military coups and over three decades of one-party centralised dictatorship diverted the country's resources from public to personal interests (Abdullah, 1998; Richards, 1996). The 1967 military coup led by Brigadier David Lansana (the then head of the army) prevented Siaka P. Stevens and his All Peoples Congress party from taking over the reins of governance after a controversial electoral victory over the then ruling Sierra Leone Peoples' Part (SLPP). However, Stevens was reinstated as Prime Minister in 1968 after a succession of military coups (Abdullah, 1998; Gberie, 2005; Keen, 2005). The return of Siaka Stevens to take over governance after one year of exile in the neighbouring Republic of Guinea, after winning the 1967 elections, and determined to consolidate his power and to prevent future coup military coups, set the stage for centralised authoritarianism around the 1970s.

To consolidate his stay in power, and in part, due to his lack of confidence in the army and police, Siaka Stevens established a para-military Presidential Guard (initially known as the Internal Security Unit (ISU) and later the State Security Division (SSD)) made up mostly of his tribesmen and loyal only to him. He provided them with training, resources and logistics over the official state police and armed forces (Alie, 1990). In

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<sup>24</sup>Based on provisional results of the 2015 population and housing census. The 2004 census reported a population of about 4.9 million people.

1972, Stevens dissolved the post-independence local government systems<sup>25</sup> and in their place established management committees which he appointed personally. In 1978, following a skewed electoral space in which opposition parties were either bribed, intimidated or forcefully prevented from contesting elections, Stevens' government declared a one party state – outlawing all forms of opposition and making the APC the only state political party (Gberie, 2005; Gbla, 2006). With the declaration of one party rule, the line between the three arms of government became blurred. For instance, Supreme Court judges and heads of the police and army were all appointed as Members of Parliament. For many (Gberie, 2005, Keen, 2005), the 1970s was the precursor to war in Sierra Leone as political opponents were unlawfully detained, illegally tried, and convicted.

Post-independence economic growth deteriorated under the leadership of the All People's Congress (APC) party from 1968 to 1992; the period was also defined by a heavy crackdown on political dissidents with allegations of treason and 'faked' military coups meant to silence opponents, corruption, and the mismanagement of natural resources by a syndicate of Lebanese diamond businessmen close to President Stevens (Reno, 1995).

Centralised one-party dictatorship, natural resources mismanagement (Keen, 2002; 2003; 2005) and the exclusion of large sections of society from the governance of the state led to economic and political degradation and by the late 1980s, Sierra Leone was ranked second from the bottom in the UN Human Development Index Report of 1993. The poor state of the economy constrained government's ability to fund key public services such as university subsidies for students, wages for teachers, health care workers, the police and armed forces, and led to nationwide student strikes and long queues in stalls and shopping outlets for essential commodities such as rice and fuel.

In addition to centralised authoritarianism, public sector mismanagement and political exclusion, one can safely add IMF and World Bank conditionality, which saw the devaluation of the national currency, privatisation of state-owned enterprises and a massive reduction of the public sector, as some of the contributing factors to the outbreak of the civil war in 1991. By the early 1990s, the country was on the brink of collapse with unbearable levels of poverty, high and pervasive unemployment,

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<sup>25</sup> At independence Sierra Leone had a system of elective local government which was abolished in 1972 by President Stevens on the basis that local government had become weak, corrupt, and inefficient and a burden to central government (see Acemoglu et al., 2013; Jackson, 2005).

dwindling public services and a government unable to pay its public-sector workforce (Reno, 1995, 1998). Youth unemployment, partly due to a dysfunctional economy and broken educational system, and a contracting political space for opposition and dissent, became the catalyst for revolt and the incubator for the breeding of dissent and violence.

In March 1991, a former army corporal named Foday Sankoh<sup>26</sup> – a victim of the one-party dictatorship – with support from Liberia’s Charles Taylor,<sup>27</sup> formed the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and quickly mobilised unemployed youths marginalised by the urban political class and an authoritarian rural gerontocracy (Abdullah, 1998; Gberie, 2005). With an ill-equipped army, the war quickly engulfed large swathes across the country, killing over 50,000 and displacing thousands more. Criminal gangs and unemployed youths quickly bloated the army ranks, from less than 5,000 before the war, to about 15,000 by the mid-1990s (Albrecht and Jackson, 2009; Gbla, 2006). In April 1992, a group of junior military officers, dissatisfied with their poor welfare and dysfunctional military hardware in the battlefield, marched unchallenged to the State House in Freetown and overthrew the APC-led government in a coup that brought in army captain Valentine Strasser as head of state and chairman of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC).

The poor state of fighting preparedness and capacity of the armed forces during the Stevens era, meant that by the mid-1990s, RUF rebels had taken over the diamondiferous regions of the country, giving them access to the country’s natural resource wealth. As the war raged on and more people were killed and displaced, public trust in the military regime to prosecute the war waned, leading to national and international demands for democratic elections. The vote which followed in 1996 saw the election of a retired UN diplomat, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP), as president. His election witnessed initial attempts at peace building, a negotiated peace settlement with the rebel force and public sector governance reform processes (Ero, 2000; Gbla, 2006). However, such efforts were short-lived as the army again overthrew the Kabbah-led civilian government, one year into his five-year mandate. It took the intervention of a West African military initiative – the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) –

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<sup>26</sup> Foday Sankoh was dismissed from the army and detained at the central prison during the 1980s for alleged involvement in a failed coup attempt against President Stevens.

<sup>27</sup> In April 2012, the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) in the Hague found the former Liberian President (Charles Taylor) guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity for ‘aiding and abetting’ the RUF in its atrocities in Sierra Leone between 1996 and 2002.

and a combination of British and UN peacekeepers to militarily crackdown on the joint Sierra Leone army and the RUF's self-styled People's Army (Keen, 2005) and force a peace agreement in 1999 which saw the cessation of hostilities and deployment of a 17,500 strong UN peacekeeping force. Following the peace deal, Britain, the United Nations and other international donors supported and funded a programme of DDR of former fighters, governance and security sector reform (SSR) – including public financial management and democratic decentralisation (Fanthorpe et al., 2011). However, this does not (and did not) translate into a peaceful and socially cohesive society. As Addison (2003:1) noted, peace is an elusive concept and the 'term post-conflict is often a sad misnomer', a reason this study opted to use the more explicit phrase - 'post-war', instead of post-conflict.

### **3.2 The Evolution of Sierra Leone's Post-War Decentralisation Reforms**

Following the dissolution of the post-independence elective local government system in 1972 (Fanthorpe, 2005; Jackson, 2006), the responsibility of supervising service delivery at the local level was deconcentrated to small teams of provincial, district and town council management committees. While deconcentrated field officials of central government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) were still responsible for delivering limited public services at the local level – such as schools and hospitals – and managed directly from Freetown, the deconcentrated colonial role of District Officer (DO) was nominally responsible for coordinating their activities (Jackson, 2005). The governance relationship between Freetown and the rest of the country was both instructive and extractive: deconcentrated officials took directives and implemented policies from Freetown whilst the centre extracted resources from the periphery with little in return in terms of service delivery at the local level (Fanthorpe et al., 2011). The townships of Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Koidu, and the city of Freetown, were administered by politically-appointed committees of management, with little or no local representation and participation.

However, successive military and civilian governments have prioritised local government reform in different ways, both as a public service delivery tool and to extend the legitimacy of the state outside Freetown (Zhou, 2009). As part of these earlier initiatives of local government reform, the NPRC military junta commissioned a study in 1994 to understand the structure, functions and limitations of Sierra Leone's post-colonial local government system, and to recommend how to reactivate the

disbanded town and city councils (Zwanikken et al., 1994). The findings of the study were damning for both the former APC government, as well as the NPRC junta that commissioned it. It noted that while political and economic powers in Sierra Leone had become severely over-centralised during three decades of one-party rule on the one hand, on the other, the NPRC military regime had ‘failed to articulate a clear vision of decentralization beyond the re-activation of district and town councils’ (Fanthorpe et al., 2011:50). Decentralisation reforms under the NPRC never moved beyond a statement of intent and a military-appointed delegation headed by former President Tejan Kabbah (then senior adviser to the NPRC) to study the Ghanaian decentralisation system.

Two years later, a civilian government was elected, and with it came renewed vigour on local governance reform. The Sierra Leone People’s Party civilian regime, led by President Kabbah, reaffirmed its commitment to reversing the centralising trend of past governments and to allow people to be actively involved in their own development (Fanthorpe et al., 2011). In his address to Parliament in May 1998, President Kabbah underscored his government’s vision and commitment to democratic decentralisation: ‘Our aim is to ensure the restoration of a decentralised local government system...via democratic elections’.<sup>28</sup>

The President emphasised the need to promote a functional local government system to support central government in its post-war reconstruction and public service delivery drive. To move forward the proposed reforms in a coordinated manner, a national public sector roadmap, the Good Governance and Public Sector Reform Strategy, was developed and rolled out by government. The strategy prioritised decentralisation and local governance as key components of public sector reform, to enhance efficiency and equity in the management of the public bureaucracy and public service delivery across the country (Gaima, 2009).

While the proposed reforms were being formulated, the government was also actively fighting a brutal insurgency. As the war escalated, decentralisation reforms were overtaken by the immediate security needs of protecting lives and property. Understandably, post-war challenges of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former fighters, and the reform of the security sector overshadowed governance reform and local service delivery priorities. Although there may be intrinsic expectations, social cohesion was not overtly proffered as an intended outcome of decentralisation in

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<sup>28</sup> Presidential Address, on State Opening of Parliament, Friday, 22nd May, 1998 (accessed 20 November 2014: <http://www.sierra-leone.org/Speeches/kabbah-052298.html>).

the early stages. However, the end of the civil war in 2002 coincided with a new international world order – after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States of America – with a new emphasis on rebuilding failed states to stop them from becoming, in the words of President George Bush, part of the ‘axis of evil’, where Islamist Jihadists can find refuge (Duffield, 2001; Fukuyama, 2004). State building – the creation of new and the strengthening of existing public institutions (Fukuyama, 2004; Greenwood et al., 2008; Bevir, 2011) with the appropriate capacity to govern in an effective, efficient and accountable manner – became the approach favoured by development partners in post-conflict governance reform interventions. Sierra Leone was arguably, by the end of its civil war in 2002, an archetype of a failed state in western interpretations of state effectiveness (Fukuyama, 2004; Wai, 2012). After all, by 2002 the state in Sierra Leone was dysfunctional; the central government was barely visible outside Freetown and the institutional and social memory of decentralisation and local government buried under 30 years of one-party dictatorship (Edwards et al., 2014; World Bank, 2014). Hence, by 2005, decentralisation had been fully co-opted by the state and its donor partners as a key security enforcement strategy and a conduit for post-war service delivery, social cohesion, and the extension of government authority outside Freetown (Government of Sierra Leone, 2005).

Despite limitations on a wholesale local governance reform package during President Kabbah’s first term of office (1996-2002), the momentum was renewed in his second presidential term (2002-2007). In a donor consultative meeting in Paris in November 2002, a consensus was reached between donors and the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) that decentralisation should be prioritised as a governance reform agenda, to correct the wrongs of the past that accounted for the marginalisation and exclusion of large swathes of society in the governance of the state (Hanlon, 2005; Zhou, 2009). In a press statement from the Office of the President dated 6th November 2002, the government reaffirmed its commitment to local government by ‘upholding the sanctity’ of the institution of chieftaincy <sup>29</sup> alongside elective local councils within a framework of local government. It appeared that the president’s vision of local government resembled a semi-colonial structure of elected district and town/municipal councils, operating alongside the institution of chieftaincy. But, for the government to graciously cede power through decentralisation questions an age-old political science orthodoxy –

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<sup>29</sup> At present, there are 149 chiefdoms, each with a Paramount Chief who is the traditional ruler elected for life from among members of pre-approved chieftaincy or ruling families by an electoral college, and acts as the custodian of custom, land, law and order.

that politicians guard power jealously and do not voluntarily forgo either it or the resources ‘inherent in meaningful decentralisation’ (Smoke 2006:196). While the effect of donor pressure to decentralise should not be trivialised, the government’s aspirations of decentralisation appear to run contrary to the views of major donors who were very sceptical about the role of chiefs in a decentralised democratic dispensation. As some commentators have noted, the decision of international donor partners, such as DfID, to fund an elaborate programme of chieftaincy-strengthening ahead of local government reform, was a wrong first step, tantamount to recreating the preconditions of the war (Hanlon, 2005; Mbawa, 2012).

As this thesis argues in the succeeding chapters, international donor partners completely underestimated the ability and motivations of national leaders to hide behind the cloak of state-building while subtly pushing a local political agenda to control political and economic power (Sorensen, 2004). Besides, donor fears of a parallel local government system of chieftaincy and elective local councils, as a zero-sum game between democracy and centralised authoritarianism in a country with a long history of chieftaincy and traditional authority, demonstrate complete ignorance of and disrespect for local political economy considerations. In the opinion of a senior local government official in Freetown, the international community failed to conduct a background check on President Kabbah, a ‘former District Officer under colonial rule’, who, when he spoke of upholding the ‘sanctity of chiefs’, was doing so in reminiscence of his ‘good old days’ as a District Officer, yearning to have under his presidency, an active chieftaincy institution, subservient to the state, ‘gathering votes’, ‘collecting taxes’ and ‘enforcing laws’ in their chiefdom.<sup>30</sup>

In January 2002, the war was officially declared over after a peace agreement between the government and the RUF rebel movement, and an internationally funded programme of DDR and security sector reconstruction had begun, prior to the official declaration of the end of the war in January, 2002. In the presidential elections that followed a few months later, President Kabbah won a resounding victory, and his government rolled out the Governance, Decentralisation and Rural Development Programme (GDRDP) through the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (Gaima, 2009). A national decentralisation taskforce chaired by the Vice President was established, with representation drawn from development partners,

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with a senior official of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Freetown (August, 2014).

MDAs, traditional and religious authorities, and civil society organisations. The overarching goal of the task force was to carry out a review of all relevant legislation relating to local government, and to proffer recommendations to the government for decentralisation legislation (Gaima, 2009). To support the work of the taskforce, an internationally-hired consultant was seconded to it to provide technical backstopping in the review process and to document the views of citizens from a nationwide consultation on the model and structure of local government system citizens would prefer. Although the local government ministry was supposed to provide secretarial facilities and strategic national leadership for the national decentralisation consultations, the LGA itself was drafted by an international consultant housed in the office of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice.<sup>31</sup> The draft law was approved by parliament in March 2004, followed by local council elections in May 2004. As an annex to the act, the local government ministry, together with MDAs, developed a list and timetable of 80 functions to be gradually devolved to local councils in a transitional phase from 2004-2008 (Zhou, 2009).

Among the several drawbacks of the LGA is the fact that the Act was passed hurriedly, lacked a strategic and overreaching government policy on decentralisation, and contained ambiguities and inconsistencies with other national legislation (Gaima, 2009; Srivastava and Larizza, 2011; World Bank, 2014). To manage some of these challenges and harmonise the inconsistencies and ambiguities, a National Decentralisation Policy (NDP) was formulated in 2010, re-echoing the government's commitment to decentralisation via devolution, and calls for the complete transfer of all (80) functions and resources needed to effectively deliver on those functions (Edward et al., 2014). The decentralisation policy also critically altered a key provision of the LGA, which stated that local councils are the 'highest political authorities', to read instead, the 'highest development authorities' in their localities (Government of Sierra Leone, 2010). A 2013 joint declaration dubbed the 'Hill Valley Devolution Forum' brought together decentralisation stakeholders from across the country with a commitment to not only uphold and strengthen the decentralisation project, but also to devolve all functions by December 2014 (Decentralisation Secretariat, 2013). However, the launch of the decentralisation policy in 2010 coincided with the reintroduction of the post of District Officer (DO) (the deconcentrated focal point for the central government), leading to

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with a senior official of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Freetown (August, 2014).

concerns among development partners about the government's commitment to full scale devolution.<sup>32</sup>

### **3.3 Decentralisation Motivations: External or Internal?**

Political transformation; especially at the state level, in post-war countries, is mostly a consequence of external influence which, by definition, is outside the domain of the local context, where the change is expected to have its most profound impact (Sorensen, 2004; Clist, 2009). The experience of 9/11 changed the boundaries of national sovereignty as the escalation of insecurity in so-called failed states was used to justify the rise of pre-emptive wars fought in territories outside those of the aggressor nations (Fukuyama, 2004). Such a globalised view of security legitimised external intervention in domestic politics after a global coalition of the willing invaded Iraq and Afghanistan in 2001 and 2003 respectively, under the banner of the 'war on terror'. Weak and failed states became the centre of attention and the 'white man's burden', to plagiarise William Easterly (2006), and 'the toughest development challenge of our era', according to former World Bank President, Robert Zoellick (Ghani and Lockhart, 2009). In external invasions that stopped short of war and explicit 'regime change', the 'state building consensus' became the panacea for intervention (Woodward, 2011). At the international level, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and western donor countries attempted (and in many cases succeeded) to influence policy outcomes in the global south.

The 1989 World Development Report for the first time categorically labelled the challenges of war, famine, poverty and underdevelopment in Africa as a 'crisis of governance' – a neutral phrase chosen by the Bank's lawyers to avoid violating its non-political charter (World Bank, 1989). The early 1990s therefore, represent a significant change of vocabulary in the international development lexicon, in which the terms 'uncivilised' became 'underdeveloped', and 'savage peoples' became 'third world' (Easterly, 2006:20). In fact, the expression 'third world' suddenly became synonymous with underdevelopment, conflict and violence in the global south (Dowden, 2008). Therefore, solving the governance crisis in sub-Saharan Africa required a transformation of the region's public bureaucracy, signaling the emergence of good governance – the efficient management of the public sector – and decentralisation within the wider governance reform agenda (Cammack, 2004; Woodward, 2011). The reasoning was simply presented: decentralisation brings the decision-making process

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with a senior DfID international staff member in Freetown (September, 2014).

closer to local sources of information, and therefore makes it more responsive to local needs and priorities (Smoke, 2003; Lockwood, 2005; Crawford and Hartman, 2008).

It was within this global context of institutional formalism, securitisation and international interventionism that Sierra Leone's civil war ended in 2002, creating the perfect situation for internationally-led governance reform to harness the window of opportunity and political will created by the fragile nature of the post-war state. The winds of democratisation in the early 1990s witnessed the instrumentalisation of decentralisation as a necessary precondition for development in emerging societies (Bangura and Larbi, 2006). The IMF and the World Bank, dissatisfied with both the quantity and quality of public service delivery, and an inefficient public bureaucracy in a post-war weak state, were instrumental in pushing for democratic forms of representative and accountable local and central governments in Sierra Leone (Fanthorpe et al., 2011). However, the approach of both actors – especially the World Bank – typifies the characteristics of a neoliberal project designed to advance neoclassical economics and market-oriented service delivery interventions (Steger and Roy, 2010). As a senior economist in Freetown argues, the 'Bank's role is essentially neoliberal: lending with interest and stiff conditions geared towards a minimalist state'.<sup>33</sup> The World Bank's strategy therefore, in the context of Sierra Leone's governance reform, was to prioritise the devolution of public service delivery functions to local councils, with transparent and efficient financial management institutions that provided for active private sector involvement in the production and distribution of public services.<sup>34</sup> Such preferences resonate deeply with the neoliberal economic project of IFIs in favour of a smaller, stronger and capable state (Reno, 1998; Steger and Roy, 2010). As Bangura and Larbi (2006:8) argued, 'decentralisation itself is an attempt to broaden the plurality of politics, and prevent the concentration of power in a few hands, ethnic groups or regions'.

Within the context of a clear international agenda of governance reform, some observers have argued that while the anticipated efficiency gains associated with decentralisation may have motivated the government of Sierra Leone to decentralise, they may not have been the primary motivations (Srivastava and Larizza, 2011). Rather, the government's core decentralisation motives can be summarised in two underlying

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with a senior economics lecturer, University of Sierra Leone; Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>34</sup> Interview with a senior World Bank Freetown-based international staff member; Freetown (August, 2014).

political and economic considerations among elites of the governing SLPP coalition. Robinson (2010) argues that it is futile to use normative concepts to explain the decision to decentralise in post-war Sierra Leone as the improvement of public services, often trumpeted by actors as their main motivation, is a smokescreen to mask the main motivation, making decentralisation, a ‘technical weapon’, deployed by both local and international actors to achieve their ‘strategic interests’ (Muhumuza, 2008:63).

Firstly, the ruling Sierra Leone People’s Party was poised to score a political point by negating the policies of the former ruling party – the APC – by reconfiguring the national political architecture that would reduce the political and economic dominance of Freetown by redirecting power and resources towards the periphery (Srivastava and Larizza, 2011; Conteh, 2014). The abolition of elective local councils in 1972 (Jackson, 2005; Kargbo, 2014), and the subsequent declaration of one-party rule in 1978, had effectively eliminated the SLPP from the political and governance realm of Sierra Leone, while consolidating the APC’s grip on power.<sup>35</sup> The SLPP’s decision to decentralise after the civil war was political – the party was effectively restaging a political battle it had lost over three decades ago.

Secondly, decentralisation was designed both to meet popular demands for political reform and to enhance the government’s legitimacy and increase political support for the ruling party. By 2002, when the war ended, President Kabbah and his party had won over 70% of the popular vote in the country’s general election (Kaldor and Vincent, 2006). The momentum of the big public mandate for the SLPP was perceived as a vote of confidence for the party’s contribution to peace-building and national stability. Therefore, the SLPP pushed for partisan local council elections as a way of spreading the party’s influence and control at the local level, with the hope of replicating its 2002 electoral victory.<sup>36</sup>

Beyond the SLPP’s desire to score a political point over the APC and to spread its influence and control outside Freetown, the party also had ulterior motivations which were not made public:

When the war ended in 2002, the government was completely cash-strapped and dependent on donor support; besides most of the party’s supporters remained jobless during APC’s one-party rule. The president cannot make all of them ministers nor put them in top civil

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with a political science lecturer at the University of Sierra Leone, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>36</sup> Interview with a political science lecturer at the University of Sierra Leone, Freetown (August, 2014).

service jobs.... We were badly constrained, and the donors weren't ready to give us a dime if we [didn't] decentralise. So, we had to do what the donors wanted.... Luckily, decentralisation provided us [with] job opportunities for those politicians who were floating in Freetown.<sup>37</sup>

The former minister's comments, without doubt, indicate some of the central motivations for decentralising at the time the government decided to do so. Whilst the government was cash-strapped and dependent on donor support, the incentive of creating jobs for party loyalists was a central motivation for the SLPP to decentralise, to accommodate floating party stalwarts who had become a burden to the Freetown political elites. Indisputably, there was a huge international pressure to decentralise, but local political considerations were important in deciding and shaping the political, fiscal and administrative structure of the decentralisation legislation and implementation processes. As a top government functionary summed it up, the international community thrived on the already existing willingness of the government to decentralise, not only for political reasons, but also based on citizens' demand for a reform of the centralised nature of state governance and the need to facilitate socio-economic and infrastructural development outside Freetown.<sup>38</sup> The outcome was a mix of international recommendations and local political interests, revealing a contradictory mix of either tacit accommodation of national leaders by donors, or the ability of national rulers to pursue strategies that were at odds with those espoused by external donors. It was never a zero-sum game between 'government and our donor partners; we [had] to agree at some point: donors get what they want, while respecting the views of the government of the day', remarked a former government minister active in the decentralisation process in Sierra Leone.<sup>39</sup> But the ability of political elites to smartly push through their political interests amid donor pressure and conditionality, speaks volumes about their smart political manoeuvring skills.

### **3.4 Political, Fiscal and Administrative Framework of Decentralisation**

Sierra Leone's decentralisation project was envisaged to be a democratic, multi-layered and multi-participatory local governance system (see Figure 3 below), with diffused political and economic powers, setting out political, fiscal and administrative frameworks for devolution of power and resources at the local level. The following subsection discusses the political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation arrangements as

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with a former minister in the SLPP government of 2002-2007, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> Interview with a senior local government official, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> Interview with a former minister in the SLPP government of 2002-2007, Freetown (August, 2014).

provided for in the Local Government Act of 2004 and other non-statutory provisions and institutions, such as the World Bank-funded Institutional Reform and Capacity Building Project (IRCBP).

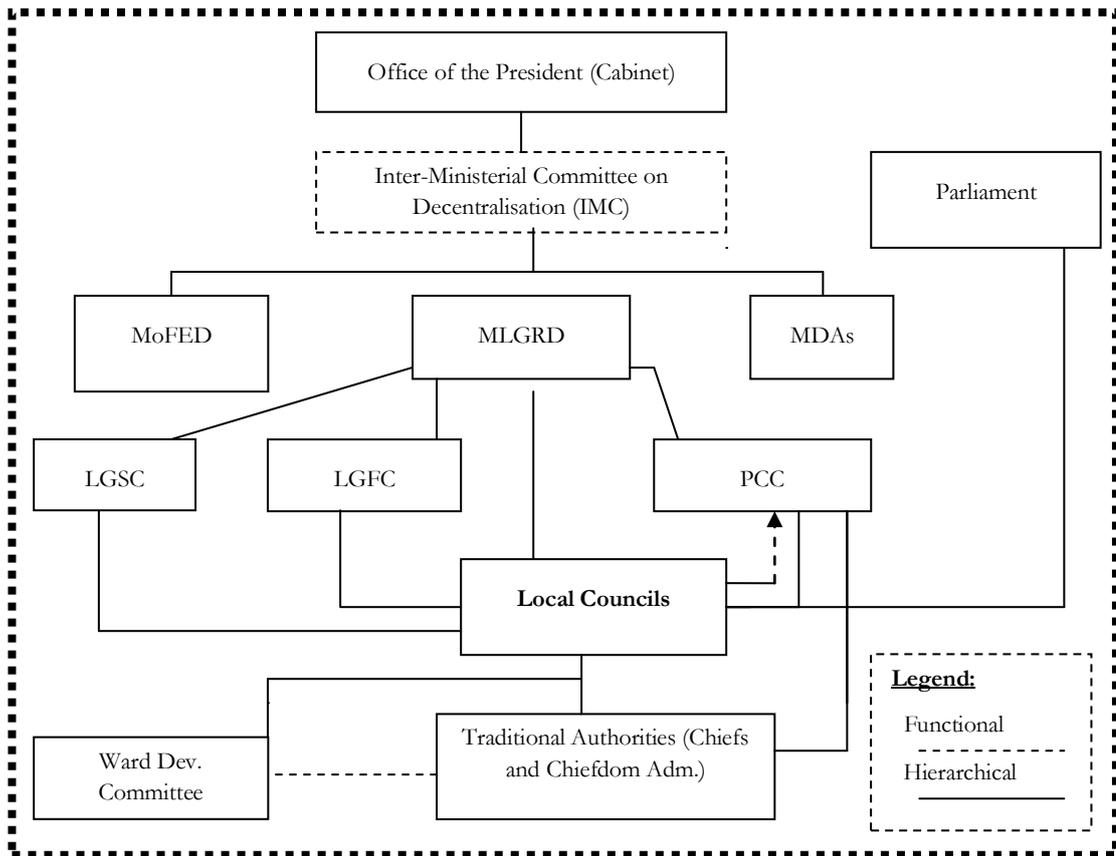
#### *3.4.1 Political Decentralisation*

The 2004 Local Government Act of Sierra Leone distinguishes between ‘local government’ and ‘local council’. It defines the former as a system of government below the central state and the latter as ‘the highest political authority’ in a locality and responsible for ‘promoting the welfare and development of its residents’, using available capacity and resources mobilised from a range of sources, including central government grants.<sup>40</sup> The Act also sets out the political and regulatory framework and provisions regarding the functions and responsibilities of councils (such as the qualifications for candidates for council elections and conduct of council business), functions and composition of ward development committees (WDCs), transparency and accountability mechanisms, and the coordination and facilitation roles of the ministries of local government and finance. In acknowledgment of the role of traditional authorities, the LGA also provides for 20% chieftaincy representation (in councils where there are chiefs) in each council and ward committee, in a devolution process premised on the principle of subsidiarity – decisions made by levels of government no higher than necessary to perform a given function (Vischer, 2001). Therefore, the domain of responsibility granted to a particular level in a hierarchy should correspond to the problems unique to its area of responsibility.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Reminiscent of the 1950 District Councils Ordinance which provides for the functioning of district and town councils, sandwiched by central government and chiefdom administration (see Fanthorpe et al., 2011).

<sup>41</sup> See Figure 3, illustrating the relationship among the key stakeholders in Sierra Leone’s decentralization process.



**Figure 3: Structure of the local government system in Sierra Leone**

Source: National Decentralisation Policy 2010

To promote active citizenship participation, councils are obliged to give a minimum of seven days public notice prior to council general meetings which are to be conducted in public using the local language, and with council minutes published – including, procurement notices and development plans, budgets and other documents – on council notice boards. In addition, each council has a number of ward development committees made up of 10 elected members with a mandatory 50% female representation. In general, the role of the WDCs is to mobilise community members to engage in community development programmes, monitor council activities and contribute to development planning (Gaima, 2009).

Since 2004, three sets (2004, 2008 and 2012) of local council cohorts have been elected and made fully operational with a clear and understandable system of fiscal transfers, increased government spending on local public services within a comprehensive evaluation mechanism, and a regularly conducted citizens’ service delivery perception survey.<sup>42</sup> To roll out the devolution of public services, the World Bank funded the

<sup>42</sup> The two main performance assessment tools that support capacity building interventions, as well as public feedback and evaluation for local councils.

Institutional Reform and Capacity Building Project (IRCBP) with four management departments located in the ministries of local government and finance. Administrative decentralisation and capacity building for councils is coordinated by the Decentralisation Secretariat (DecSec), located in the local government ministry, whilst fiscal decentralisation, public financial management and project management activities are coordinated by the Local Government Finance Department, (LGFD), the Public Financial Management and Reform Unit (PFMRU) and the Project Implementation Unit (PIU), all located in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) (Kargbo, 2009). The World Bank-funded Institutional Reform and Capacity Building Project in support of decentralisation has supported the construction of office buildings for the 19 local councils and provided office equipment and capacity building for councillors and Ward Committee members to enhance the effective discharge of their functions. While there is a progressive trend towards political accountability and transparency in the decentralisation process, the Ward Committees remain ineffective in regard to their core functions as they are largely controlled and manipulated by councillors, with truncated public participation and upwards, rather than downwards, accountability mechanisms (Edwards et al., 2014; World Bank, 2014).

#### *3.4.2 Fiscal Decentralisation*

Fiscal decentralisation – ‘the sub-national share of total government expenditure’ (Smoke 2006:202) – as a component of decentralisation is difficult to determine in government expenditure analysis due to data limitation. However, in circumstances where there is a legal regulatory framework, the fiscal portfolio of local government should be well defined. In Sierra Leone, the revenue sources and expenditure mechanisms for councils are provided for in parts seven and eight of the 2004 Local Government Act. The Act details councils’ expenditure responsibilities, revenue assignments and the basis for central-local government fiscal relations, resource mobilisation and distribution. Local councils have three main sources of funding: firstly, councils are funded through own source revenue (OSR), which includes fees, licenses, royalties, mining revenues and other sources generated from within their localities. Secondly, councils receive grants from central government for devolved functions – such as education and health – and for other administrative expenses related to the discharge of their responsibilities. The objective of the intergovernmental fiscal transfer therefore, is to ensure that councils have reasonable resources to deliver their devolved functions and to ensure services improve, and not deteriorate (either in quantity or

quality) because of devolution (Kargbo, 2009). Thirdly, councils can also generate resources through grants and loans from the private sector or donor partners and through donations.

Over the years, the main revenue sources for local councils had been central government transfers, received mainly through tied and untied grants.<sup>43</sup> This is based on a fiscal transfer formula that determines both the vertical pool (total national sectoral allocation earmarked for devolution) and horizontal (the breakdown of sectoral grants to local councils based on the agreed fiscal formula) distribution of resources (MoFED, 2008; 2012). During the transition phase of devolution (2004-2008), the vertical resources envelope was to be determined based on central government expenditure on each devolved sector, and to be at least equal to what it was prior to devolution. After 2008, the vertical resource pool – the share of central government sectoral budget earmarked for local spending – was to be allocated such that councils could deliver services at an appropriate standard. This mechanism was difficult to both determine and implement as local public services were generally underfunded prior to decentralisation and most central government expenditure before 2004 was not done through ‘activity-based’ budgeting determined at the local level (Edwards et al., 2014). This lack of clarity in the vertical allocation pool led to protracted negotiation processes between councils and central government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), facilitated by the Local Government Finance Department (LGFD), which also doubles as the secretariat of the Local Government Finance Committee (LGFC).<sup>44</sup>

In terms of the horizontal distribution of the vertical pool to local councils, the LGA makes provision for equitable distribution of resources, reflecting the expenditure needs and revenue generation capacity of each council. This resulted in the design of a transparent – but highly fragmented – grant distribution formula based on existing public service delivery facilities and the number of residents in each local council area relative to the national population.<sup>45</sup> The structural and conceptual design of the fiscal formula – designed by MoFEd with technical support from the World Bank – was later deemed by local councils, civil society and other critical voices within the finance ministry, to be too complicated and fragmented; it failed to give autonomy to local councils, and lacked fundamental efficiency and equity considerations (MoFED, 2012).

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<sup>43</sup> Tied grants dedicated grants for specific functions, whilst untied grants are for discretionary ones.

<sup>44</sup> See Chapters Four and Eight for the composition and functions of the LGSC.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter Four for a detailed analysis of the grant distribution formula.

In 2010, through technical support from the Urban Institute’s Centre for International Development and Governance, the old grant system was reviewed and a new grant distribution formula – the Second-Generation Intergovernmental Fiscal Transfer System – was developed, based on a philosophy of linking finance and functions through client-based expenditure norms and affordable service delivery standards (MoFED, 2012).

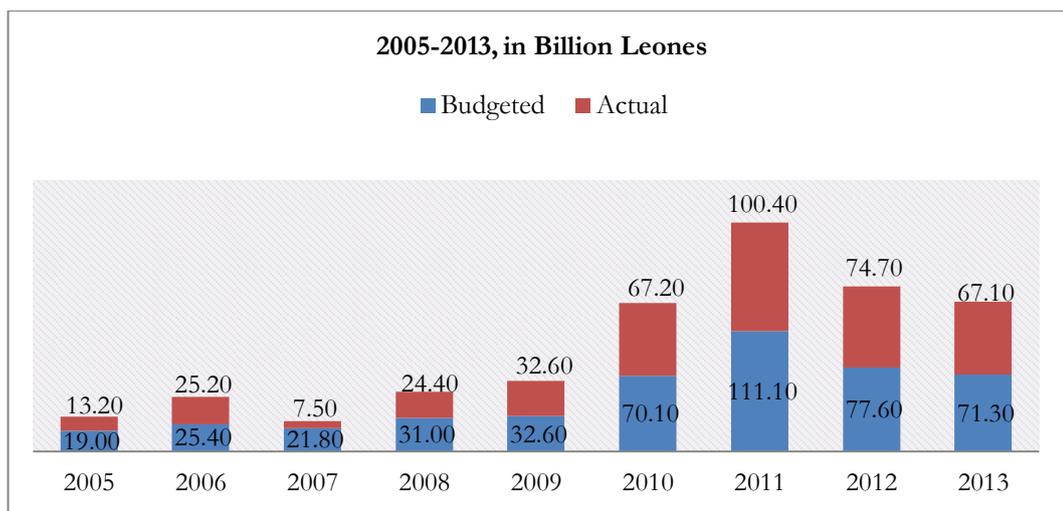
**Table 2: Comparison of old and new grant distribution formulas**

<b>Old vs. New Grant Distribution Systems</b>	
<b>Old System</b>	<b>New System (Second Generation)</b>
<b>Devolved Sector Grant:</b> Health, Education, Agriculture, Rural Water, Solid Waste, Fire Prevention, Social Welfare, Youth and Sports	<b>Devolved Sector Grant:</b> Health, Education, Agriculture, Rural Water, Social Welfare
<b>Administrative Grant:</b> Salaries for core staff, Sitting Fees for councillors, support to Ward Committee, and other recurrent expenditures	<b>1. Administrative Grant:</b> Salaries for core staff, Sitting Fees for councillors, support to Ward Committee
	<b>2. Unconditional Block Grant (Combines):</b> Solid Waste, Fire Prevention, Social Welfare, Youth and Sports, Marine, and Administrative Grant (only for the other recurrent components)
Local Government Development Grant (LGDG): Single grant decided by the finance ministry	<b>LGDG:</b> (1) Discretionary LGDG (for pure local public infrastructure - markets, slaughter houses, etc. (2) Sectoral Local Government Development Grant (SLGDG)

Source: MoFED, 2012

Since 2005, central government budgeted, as well as actual, transfers to local councils have increased progressively. In 2007, for instance, the central government budgeted transfer for non-salary, no-interest and non-capital activities to local councils was 21.8 billion Leones<sup>46</sup>. In 2012, it had increased by over 70%, to 77.6 billion Leones. While this suggests a remarkable achievement for a country with over three decades of centralisation, Figure 4 illustrates inconsistencies between budgeted and actual transfers to councils, and a lack of predictability for central government grants to support planned local service delivery (Kargbo, 2009). Despite the growth in central government transfers to local authorities, local councils in Sierra Leone are largely underfunded – relative to their devolved functions – as transfers to councils for local services account for less than 7% of overall annual public sector expenditures (Edwards et al., 2014).

<sup>46</sup> At the time of writing, the official Bank of Sierra Leone foreign exchange rate was \$1:Le 4,500 and £1:Le 6,500.



**Figure 4: Budget versus actual central government transfers to local councils**

Source: Author's calculation based on MoFED data, (2014)

Among the three local council revenue sources, own source revenue is crucial in ensuring councils' true independence from central government (Rajkumar and Swaroop, 2002; Mandl et al., 2008). According to a local government finance expert in Freetown, councils will unavoidably continue to rely on central government grants as a crucial component of their funding, although 'the more resources councils are able to generate internally, the more autonomous they will be' (Kargbo, 2009:23-24). But, as Table 3 illustrates, councils' local resource generating capacity has been generally weak, with uneven progress among different councils. In 2005, for instance, the combined own source revenue of local councils was 4.7 billion Leones, improving to 5.3 billion in 2008 and 16.3 billion in 2010. Despite this progress it represents, on average, less than 30% of councils' total annual expenditure (Searle, 2009).

**Table 3: Councils' own revenue versus central Govt. grants (in Billion Leones)**

Year	Own Source Revenue	Govt. Grants	Total Income	% of OSR on Income
2005	4.7	13.20	17.90	26.26
2006	5.5	25.20	30.70	17.92
2007	4.3	7.50	11.80	3.64
2008	5.4	24.40	9.80	18.12
2009	16.3	32.60	48.90	33.33
2010	16.3	67.20	83.50	19.52
2011	13.3	100.40	113.70	11.70
2012	13.8	74.70	88.50	15.59
2013	15.5	69.10	84.60	18.32
			Total %	18.27

Source: Author's calculation based on MoFED data (2014)

In addition to the intergovernmental fiscal transfer and capacity building for local revenue mobilisation, fiscal decentralisation also focused on developing a sound public financial management regime for local councils. Following criticisms of councils' financial management in the 2010 expenditure and financial review, the local government finance department introduced the PETRA accounting and financial management software – an integrated solution for data management and manipulation to support comprehensive accounting and financial reporting standards – and financial management regulation to enhance councils' financial management capacity (Kargbo, 2009).

The intergovernmental fiscal transfer system has been hailed by many observers as one of most successful components in Sierra Leone's decentralisation programme (Edwards and Boex, 2013; World Bank, 2014). However, the selection criteria used for grant distribution has been widely criticised for its biases. First, a central criterion for horizontal allocation to councils is population data from the 2004 housing and population census. Some local council authorities have argued that – despite the annual population projection for each locality – the 2004 census is unrepresentative of current population trends in their localities: the population dynamics across the country changed rapidly after the war, and so, they claim, using the 2004 census as the baseline for population projection and resource distribution is unfair to local councils that have

witnessed high population growth in the last ten years.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, the second-generation grant formula does not apply to the local government development grant (LGDG)<sup>48</sup> – designed to support local public infrastructural development. Access to the grant is based on individual council requests to the finance ministry, and not pre-distributed through any generally-agreed formula.<sup>49</sup> Since the grant is open for competition, in a polarised political system councils with the ‘appropriate’ political and personal connections are more likely to get their development projects approved.

### *3.4.3 Administrative Decentralisation*

Administrative decentralisation combines the transfer of functions, personnel and assets, plus additional capabilities required by councils to deliver on their devolved functions. Statutory Instrument No 13 of the LGA provides details on the specific activities for each of the devolved functions to be carried out and the date councils are expected to take full responsibility for those functions. However, devolving central government ministries and agencies still have authority over policy and planning, quality control, monitoring and evaluation, and in most situations, procurement and award of contracts (Srivastava and Larizza, 2011). As of December, 2014, 58 of the 80 listed functions in the LGA’s statutory instrument had been fully or partly devolved.

The LGA anticipated reasonable levels of administrative autonomy for local councils to recruit and manage their own employees as a local accountability mechanism for both the elected local officials and their citizens (Edwards et al., 2014). According to the National Decentralisation Policy (2010), local councils should take full responsibility for the management of their human resources complement in accordance with established human resources policies and guidelines as set out by the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC). The human resources management role of the LGSC was designed to provide policy guidelines and to continuously evaluate the capacity of councils to take over their human resources management in the not-too-distant future. When devolution began in 2005, most local councils – apart from Freetown City Council and the former town councils of Bo, Kenema and Makeni – had no administrative staff of their own. A temporary measure was taken by the Human

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with a Local Government Finance Officer, Makeni City (August, 2014).

<sup>48</sup> See Table 4.

<sup>49</sup> See Table 4.

Resources Management Office (HRMO) to deploy the former District Officers to the councils to act as Chief Administrators (CAs).<sup>50</sup>

Each local authority has a political and an administrative team of personnel. The political team is headed by the elected mayor or chairperson. The Chief Administrator (CA) is the administrative head of the council with responsibilities for the coordination of the day-to-day activities of council, and the supervision of departments and staff. Given the capacity of the local councils, in 2009, the Local Government Service Commission, with support from the EU and in consultation with the local councils, recruited a team of 14 'core staff' in each local council. Each council now has a team of core technical personnel supervised by a council Chief Administrator, and managed by the local government service commission in terms of their appointment, promotion and transfer. In addition to the core staff, each council has a team of sectoral staff – devolved personnel from central MDAs – responsible for service delivery at the local level. This centralised approach to sectoral staff deployment at the local council level means that all matters pertaining to local sectoral staff (employment, pay, transfers, promotions, etc.) are determined by their parent ministries and departments based in Freetown. Despite the commitment of the Hill Valley Declaration of 2013, and the National Decentralisation Policy's emphatic statement of intent to ensure local councils take full responsibility for their human resource management by 2016, sectoral staffs appear not to be part of this equation, as they remain accountable to their superiors in Freetown.

### **3.5 The Local Government Act: Compromises, Ambiguities and Challenges**

Sierra Leone's post-war decentralisation programme was populated by a plethora of actors with varying motivations and preferences on the model and trajectory of decentralisation. Among international development partners, there were clear lines of differences on the scale of democratic decentralisation and the legitimacy of participants. Thus, when the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) funded the Paramount Chief Restoration Project (PCRP) in 2002, the World Bank scorned the approach, referring to it as a false start in the country's democratic transformation that legitimised authoritarianism (Mbawa, 2012). If anything needed overhauling in the country's governance, the Bank argued, it should be its undemocratic chieftaincy system which lacked popular legitimacy (Hanlon, 2005; Jackson, 2005). The Bank's desire, and

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<sup>50</sup> After the 2004 LC elections, the deconcentrated role of District Officer was temporarily suspended to allow the new councils to operate in an atmosphere of unhindered authority.

indeed that of many other donors, was to develop a system of democratic decentralisation that was transparent, institutionally compliant and service delivery-focused. The role of the Bank was crucial in rolling out decentralisation as it funded a \$24 million decentralisation project (the IRCBP) whose main goal was to provide technical, financial and logistical support to local councils and other decentralisation institutions. This institutional compliance approach of the Bank was at complete odds with the government's commitment to decentralisation which was determined to uphold the institution of chieftaincy – a difference which put donors on a collision course with the government.<sup>51</sup> The final product was a managed relationship between Sierra Leone's government's desire to bring on board chiefs, and donor preference for a democratic local government without a meaningful role for chiefs, which offered them what Gaima (2009) referred to as only a token representation in local councils.

At the national level, the government had multiple motivating factors, whilst chiefs, bureaucrats, political parties, civil society and the public all projected varying expectations and models. A popular view among Sierra Leoneans from the nationwide pre-legislative consultations for the formulation of the Local Government Act was preference for a non-partisan local government electoral system.<sup>52</sup> This preference was rooted in public dissatisfaction with traditional multi-party electoral politics, dominated by the ethno-regional bifurcation of SLPP Mende-south-east, and APC Temne north-west coalitions (Kandeh, 1992).<sup>53</sup> The hope was that a no-party local government arrangement would bring about genuine participation of local people in solving local problems. The government, however, preferred a partisan electoral local government system, arguing instead that barring political parties from contesting local elections would amount to violating the provisions of the national constitution which provides that political parties can contest national and local elections – thus leading to a hybrid electoral system allowing both independent and party-nominated candidates to contest local council elections.

From its inception, the LGA faced practical challenges and tests of systematic and legal coherence – how laws relate to one another as a body of rules, and the extent to which

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with senior political science lecturer at the University of Sierra Leone, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>52</sup> Interview with a civil society activist involved in the decentralization consultative process, Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>53</sup> This demand has been re-echoed in the on-going national constitutional review process, whose draft abridged report clearly recommended a non-partisan local government system (Constitutional Review Committee Draft Report, February, 2016).

alignment of the system is achieved (Levenbook, 1984). When new laws are promulgated, they must clearly state which ones are repealed, which have precedence and how conflicts and contradictions can be resolved. The LGA's lack of complementarity with other legislation has been noted by a number of observers (Gaima, 2009; Fanthorpe et al., 2011; Srivastava and Larizza, 2011) of the decentralisation process in Sierra Leone. Even though a key objective of the National Decentralisation Taskforce was to analyse and review existing legislation relating to or in conflict with local governance prior to the enactment of the LGA, the taskforce failed to repeal or align existing legislation with the 2004 Local Government Act. This was a crucial oversight, as most of the 80 functions identified for devolution were the legal responsibility of about 17 different MDAs. And, as Ghani and Lockhart (2008) noted, in many countries where technical assistance imports off-the-shelf laws from all parts of the world, the legal system can very quickly become a quagmire of contradictory rules and processes. Unfortunately, the devolution of functions, which requires a responsibility shift from the centre to the periphery, hinges on goodwill from central government ministries and departments, who were not in any way legally obliged to transfer responsibilities to councils.<sup>54</sup> Full scale devolution has therefore been squeezed by a legal battle between sectoral legislation and the Local Government Act over responsibility for services earmarked for devolution. In the meantime, the Decentralisation Secretariat had identified over 30 pieces of sectoral legislation in conflict with the LGA. Four of them – the 2004 Education Act, the Hospital Boards Act of 2003, the Energy and Power Act of 2011, and Local Tax (Amendment) Act of 1972 – have been prioritised for urgent review as services related to those laws are crucial to public services and human welfare. The LGA is also going through a review after the launch of the 2010 National Decentralisation Policy which, in principle, makes some of the provisions of the LGA untenable.<sup>55</sup>

Beyond the LGA's lack of complementarity, it also created new spheres of political and economic competition, both locally and nationally, especially in Section 20(1) of the Act which suggests that councils are the highest political authority (LGA, 2004:17) in their localities, and so inadvertently placed councils, chiefs and Members of Parliament (MPs) in a supremacy contest. As one local government official in Freetown noted, the ministry of local government spent a huge portion of its time and resources between

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with a senior official of the Ministry of Education, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> Interview with a senior staff of the DecSec, Freetown (August, 2014).

2004 and 2008 resolving conflicts between actors who were supposed to be working together to enhance local public service delivery.<sup>56</sup> The LGA fundamentally failed to recognise and incorporate the strategic role of Paramount Chiefs in local governance and rural service delivery. Apart from the token chieftaincy representation in councils and ward development committees, and without real power in local public service delivery process, the focus of the LGA was the organisation of powers, functions and resources for councils, without a clear role for chiefs in the overall decentralisation and service delivery dispensation. With supervisory and budgetary powers over chieftain administrations, local councils determine the local tax rate, claim precepts on revenue collected by chieftain authorities, approve chieftain councils' budgets and pass by-laws. These new powers are at odds with powerful interests, and disrupt the established socio-economic status quo, both locally and nationally.

Beyond these challenges, the LGA is silent on the relationship between chiefs and local councils on critical issues such as land, local justice, conflict prevention and mitigation. In many instances, chieftain authorities have been criticised for being uncooperative with budget supervisions, underreporting their tax collection rate, and non-compliance with councils on the implementation of by-laws. In fact, most of the chieftain authorities are not paying their precepts to councils, a situation which has negative service delivery implications at the local level.<sup>57</sup> Chieftain authorities, on the other hand, accused councillors of disrespect and interference in what are strictly chieftain and traditional matters (Robinson, 2010). However, over time, some of these conflicts' flag points have been resolved through training and better understanding among actors, and the fact the 2010 NDP had clarified some of the ambiguities of the LGA. This is not to say tensions and rivalries have faded away; they persist in different configurations.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The chapter explored the evolution of Sierra Leone's decentralisation reform within the context of a post-war internationally-funded governance and state building agenda. It highlighted the motivations and complexities of state-donor relations and the politics of decentralisation in a fragile post-war context. Based on the issues discussed, three important conclusions can be reached. First, even though the administrative, technical, and financial capacity of local councils can be improved to deliver efficient and improved public services, Sierra Leone's experience demonstrates the possibility of

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with a senior local government official, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>57</sup> See Chapters Four and Seven for analysis of some of these implications.

greater governance reform after decades of centralisation. The [re]creation of 19 functional local councils, which a little over a decade ago could only be read about in history books, and the sharing of political power by different political actors outside Freetown, demonstrate remarkable political pluralism. Financially, Sierra Leone opted for a model of central government grant distribution that is different from other countries in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>58</sup> Notwithstanding its challenges, it appears transparent, acceptable and formula-based, and has been hailed as a success (Edwards et al., 2014; World Bank, 2014). Second, while Sierra Leone's decentralisation appears similar to other governance reform models across the sub-Saharan African region, it also brings to light the country's socio-cultural peculiarities, such as the institution of chieftaincy in local governance. Despite the rejection of chieftaincy by donors, and their mere symbolic representation in councils, chiefs have proven to be crucial in local governance, and not necessarily as toxic as some donors would want to present them (Harris, 2013).

Third, while internal post-war governance reform at the national level, and the need for socio-economic and infrastructural development at the local level, were major triggers for decentralisation, the external post-war state-building consensus was critical in decentralisation reform. However, attempts by donors to push through normative international best practices by seizing the window of opportunity created by post-war political goodwill of national leaders had negative consequences on the nature of the LGA – such as its hasty passing without an overarching government policy on decentralisation. Beyond the compromises and ambiguities of the Act, the bigger challenge in local governance in Sierra Leone is how to transform councils into accountable, transparent and responsive local governance institutions that operate based on the needs and aspirations of their local residents (Kimble et al., 2012). A first critical step in understanding this transformation is the examination of the fiscal capacity of councils and the effectiveness and transparency of the intergovernmental fiscal regime, alongside their performance assessment and service delivery output.

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<sup>58</sup> See Chapter Four for other models of central-local fiscal relations.

## Chapter Four

### The Politics of Decentralised Financing and Councils' Management Performance Output

#### 4.0 Introduction

Formula-based predictable intergovernmental fiscal relations remain one of the major firewalls designed to mitigate the impact of party politics on the allocation of resources for devolved functions in decentralisation initiatives (Gupta and Verhoeven, 2001; Rajkumar and Swaroop, 2002; Crawford and Hartmann 2008; Mandl et al., 2008; Boex 2013a, 2013b; World Bank, 2014). This institutional compliance strategy (Marriage, 2013) of international donor partners – especially the World Bank – in fiscal decentralisation prioritises supposedly apolitical institutional mechanisms aimed at suppressing party politics in central-local fiscal relations in the developing world (Schmidt, 1996:156 -167; Keefer, 2002, Ahmed et al., 2005).

In line with one of the leading arguments of this thesis – that bureaucratic technicism without political economy misses fundamental contextual factors influencing public policy choices and local service delivery – this chapter questions the emphasis on this formulaic institutionalised fiscal decentralisation mechanism (Steger and Roy, 2010; Marriage, 2013) and administrative technicism in intergovernmental fiscal relations over contextual needs and priorities in the western-led crusade aimed at curbing political affiliation and bureaucratic corruption in decentralisation in the developing world (Hibbs, 1992; Schmidt, 1996; Ahmad et al., 2005; Fukuyama, 2004; Greenwood, 2008; Bevir, 2011). Based on the cumulative (2005–2013) intergovernmental transfers and local councils' service delivery and management performance assessment, this chapter addresses the thesis' sub-research questions one – regarding the nature and progress of Sierra Leone's decentralisation project, and two – which seeks to explain some of the service delivery and performance management variations among local councils – which cumulatively contribute to answering the thesis's central research question.

The chapter utilises a three-pronged structure in its aim to critically unpack the role of political affiliation in fiscal decentralisation and public service delivery, and the extent to which supposedly apolitical public resources distribution mechanisms contribute to preventing and/or mitigating the effects of political affiliation in fiscal devolution in Sierra Leone.

It first explores Sierra Leone's local public sector and intergovernmental fiscal transfer framework to explain who (central or local government) controls the greater share of the local public sector budget, and how (if at all), the political affiliation of a council's elected political leadership correlates with the share of financial resources it receives from the central government. Second, it critically discusses the institutional and socio-political context and mechanisms that determine public sector resources allocation and how this supports and/or challenges the political affiliation claim. Thirdly, the chapter critically engages with the question of whether political affiliation correlates with access to central government resources by local councils, and whether such resource access correlates with a council's service delivery and management performance output.

The chapter makes three interrelated arguments tied to the three-pronged analytical approach above. First, it suggests that part of the problem in understanding Sierra Leone's local public sector is based on the classic monetary measure of fiscal decentralisation, one that focuses largely on central government transfers to local councils. This monetary measure of fiscal decentralisation excludes central government spending for and on behalf of local public services, the motivations for central control of fiscal spending for devolved activities, and the political economy of central-local fiscal relations and public policy decision-making. Such measures of intergovernmental fiscal relations, the chapter argues, represent an inadequate interpretation of the true intergovernmental fiscal relationships and the problems of formulaic preference and institutional compliance with them. Secondly, the chapter suggests that Sierra Leone's fiscal devolution framework appears to be deliberately orchestrated to ensure councils are continuously dependent on central government funding. The transfer of functions without a corresponding resource mobilisation mandate at the local level suggests a dependence on unreliable external funding sources for local public services.

Thirdly, the chapter argues that there is barely any positive correlation between the political party membership of a council's elected political leaders, its access to central government resources and its cumulative service delivery and performance management ranking. Based on the cumulative intergovernmental fiscal transfer arrangement managed by the Local Government Finance Department (LGFED) of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED), there appears to be no consistent or deliberate pattern of resource allocation that unfairly favours ruling, over opposition, party councils. And, although the highest earner of central government transfers among the four case study councils is a ruling party council, its fiscal allocation circumstances

remained constant, even when it was opposition-led from 2004 to 2007. Indeed, some opposition councils receive more central government transfers than some of their ruling party counterparts. The chapter therefore questions the validity of the political affiliation claim and the justification for donor-led technocratic fiscal decentralisation arrangements, and calls for a deeper understanding of the political economy of fiscal decentralisation.

The chapter consists of five sections. Following this introductory section, section two analyses Sierra Leone's local public sector, to explain where (local or central government) and why the greater share of the public-sector budget is managed and spent and the politics of fiscal decentralisation. Section three discusses the local government grant system, its provisions, trajectory and limitations. The aim is to explore the politics of fiscal devolution and the limits of fiscal formulaic processes in suppressing the negative effects of political affiliation in fiscal decentralisation. Section four compares councils' central government allocation with their cumulative Comprehensive Local Government Performance Assessment Survey (CLOGPAS) ranking and the Integrated National Public Services Survey (INPSS) public perception index conducted by the decentralisation secretariat, to evidence the chapter's second and third arguments. The last section summarises the chapter, indicating how the analysis addresses each of the chapter's three main arguments.

#### **4.1 The Local Public Sector: Who Controls What?**

Despite the Government of Sierra Leone's commitment to devolution as a post-war participatory governance approach (Government of Sierra Leone, 2002; 2005) and the fact that a central argument for technocratic institutional compliance in fiscal decentralisation is to strengthen local fiscal autonomy and predictability (Rajkumar and Swaroop, 2002; Mandl et al., 2008; Boex 2013a; 2013b; World Bank, 2014), Sierra Leone's local public sector before 2004, was nothing but a cadre of sparsely funded, poorly trained and centrally controlled field-based public servants.<sup>59</sup> As a senior local government official noted, 'the local government system was trapped in a crisis of legitimacy and relevance as it was unable to attract resources from Freetown to deliver local services; [thus] justifying the case for decentralisation after the civil war'.<sup>60</sup> Based on data from the finance ministry on the annual intergovernmental fiscal transfer from 2004 to 2013, field-based interviews and other secondary sources (Boex 2013a; 2013b;

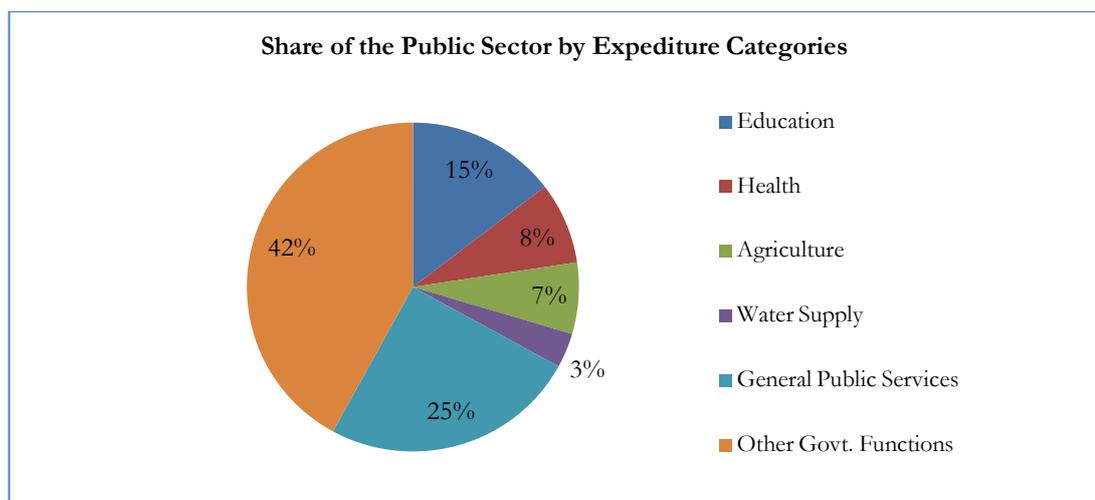
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<sup>59</sup> Interview with the Director of Local Government; MLGRD: Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>60</sup> Interview with the Director of Local Government; MLGRD: Freetown (August, 2014)

World Bank 2014), this section analyses the composition of Sierra Leone’s public sector, arguing that despite the Government of Sierra Leone’s (GoSL) rhetoric on full-scale devolution and decentralisation’s core promise of enhanced local fiscal autonomy, local public service delivery spending in Sierra Leone remains firmly under central government control.

The combination of the abysmal state of public services across the country and the chaotic public service delivery funding mechanism seriously limits any attempt at measuring the actual volume of the local public sector prior to decentralisation; it also renders any comparison of before and after devolution almost impossible as the provision of local services was highly centralised and lacked proper bookkeeping and accounting practices (Kargbo, 2009). Since 2004, the government’s local public service budget has increased progressively, from about 13 billion Leones in 2005, to a little over 100 billion in 2011.<sup>61</sup> However, these figures represent only central government’s direct transfers to local councils, and do not include spending done centrally for activities with local impact – such as salaries for teachers and nurses at the local level. Measured solely in terms of the direct central government transfers to councils for devolved functions and associated administrative costs, the local public sector represents roughly 7% of the total national public sector (World Bank, 2014). In terms of sector-specific allocations, Figure 5 indicates the dynamics of public sector expenditure priorities by the government. While, for instance, the government spends about 15% of the public sector budget on education, only 3% is spent on water supply, and 8% and 7% respectively on health and agriculture.

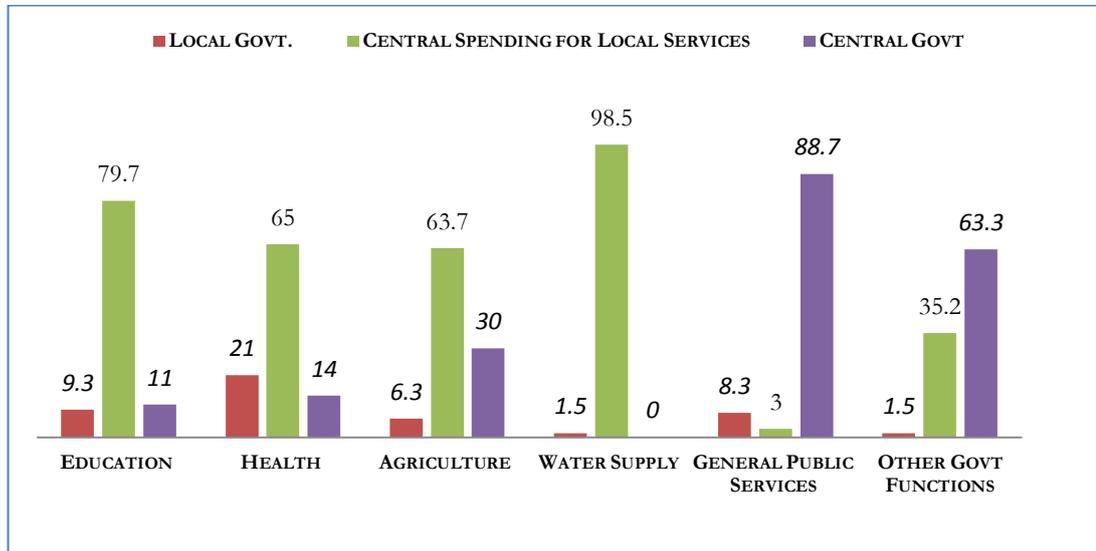


**Figure 5: Share of the public sector by expenditure categories**

Source: Author’s calculation based on MoFED (2014) data

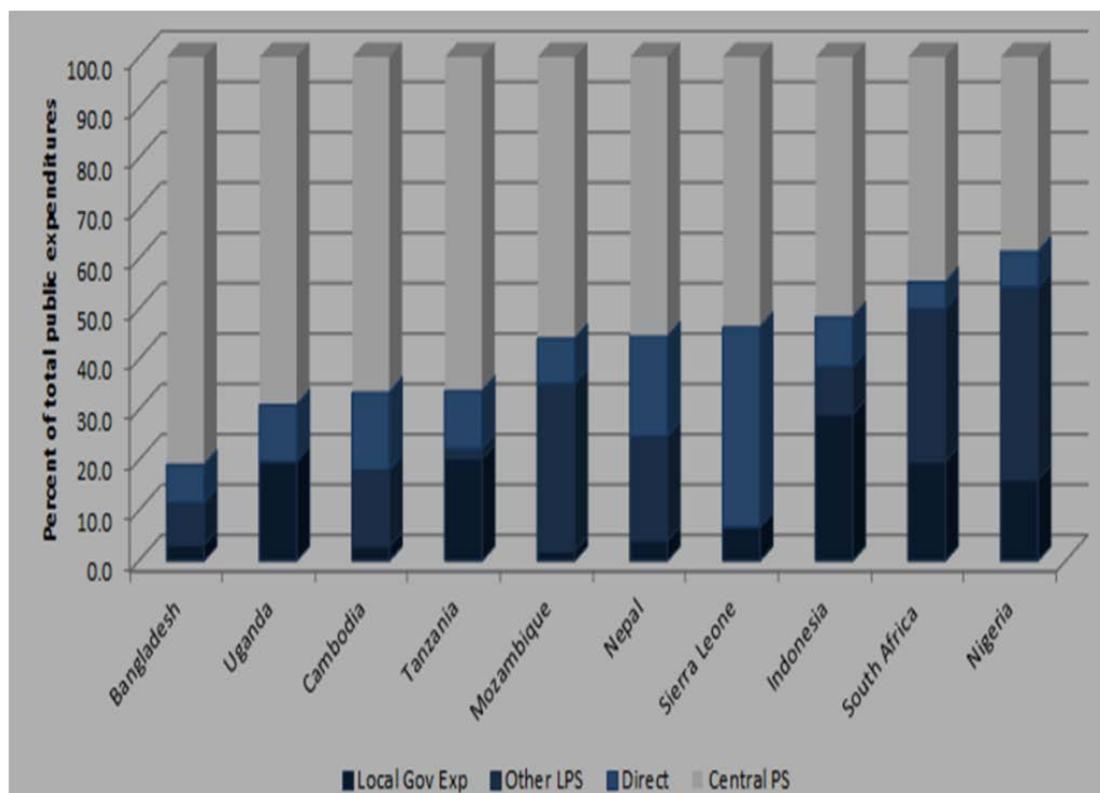
<sup>61</sup> See Figure 4 in Section 3.4.2 and Note 46 for the Leone conversion rate.

When public expenditure patterns are analysed in a holistic manner – bringing together central transfers to local governments and centralised spending for local services, Government spends a total of 46.3% of its public-sector budget in funding public services at the local level (Boex, 2013a).



**Figure 6: Share of the public sector expenditures budget between central and local governments**  
 Source: Author's calculation based on MoFED (2014) data.

However, Figure 6 suggests that the local public sector expenditure is much more than 7%. The actual figure is about 46.3% – which is relatively comparable to the 50% spent by countries in the global north on local service delivery, and also favourably comparable with some of Sierra Leone's developing countries' counterparts (Boex, 2013a).



**Figure 7: Composition and size of the local public sector expenditures: comparison of selected countries (2010-2012)**

Source: Boex (2013a: 23)

Although Sierra Leone’s share of the public sector budget for services at the local level is higher than that of Nepal and Bangladesh for instance (see Figure 7), a critical look at Figure 6 tells a different story about who controls the lion’s share of the public service budget and why. The government spends about 15% of its total public services budget on education (see Figure 5), for instance, but less than 10% of the education sector budget is managed locally. As Figure 6 illustrates, 87% of the education budget is controlled and spent centrally for services delivered locally, while 11% is spent on centralised education services. In terms of control therefore, about 90% of the education budget is centrally controlled, with only 10% controlled locally.

The gulf between what is spent centrally for local services and what local authorities control and manage for local service delivery highlights the complexities of fiscal devolution and raises a number of questions about decentralisation financing: would it not have been appropriate in the interest of the principle of subsidiarity (Vischer, 2010) in decentralisation, to have the majority of the education budget, for instance, controlled locally, since almost 90% of expenses are for local education services? Whose interests are served by such fiscal decentralisation arrangements? Are there any motivation(s) and benefits to central bureaucrats and national politicians to keep a large

proportion of the public-sector wage bill at the centre? This chapter addresses some of these political economy considerations in intergovernmental fiscal relations in Sierra Leone.

#### **4.2 The Local Government Fiscal Transfer System and Party Politics**

The intergovernmental fiscal transfer framework was set out in the LGA (2004), and guided by an essentially neoliberal code of fiscal stability, based on the key principles of prudent fiscal management such as transparency, stability, responsibility efficiency and equity (Steger and Roy, 2010:68)<sup>62</sup> in fiscal devolution, and reflecting cross-council differentials in socio-economic and managerial capacity (MoFED, 2008). The framework was premised on a theory of change which suggests that successful fiscal decentralisation and improved local public service delivery is dependent on the design and implementation of neutral and transparent grant distribution formulas that support a country's national development priorities whilst mitigating the effects of political capture and the dominance of clientelistic networks and political party interests (Smoke and Kim, 2002; Ahmed et al., 2005). Contrary to the claims of the technocratic and formulaic preference in fiscal decentralisation (Bird, 2003), this section argues that formula-based fiscal decentralisation is vulnerable to political and bureaucratic manipulations, and mostly for reasons outside the mainstream political affiliation argument (Keohane and Nye, 1989 in Schmidt, 1996; Ahmad et al., 2005). This is partly because the technocratic illusion assumes institutional neutrality and fails to account for complex local processes of kinship, tribal and family networks that influence public policy choices. Based on interaction with local public service delivery authorities during fieldwork, the chapter suggests that local preferences of fiscal allocation, such as needs-based allocation and flexibility in fiscal allocation to allow for some form of spending on local, traditional and kinship relationship building, were not accommodated.

During the transition phase of devolution (2004-2008), the objective of the grant system was to ensure decentralisation did not result in any deterioration in the quality and quantity of public services, promote the improvement of councils' local resources mobilisation, and strengthen their financial and administrative capacity to manage resources autonomously in line with national development priorities and budgetary guidelines (MoFED, 2008). It also focused on developing the vertical resource envelope

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<sup>62</sup> Equity – as opposed to equality – generally refers to resource distribution based on need, adjusted based on councils' own-resources and capacity (see Duclos, 2006).

for devolved sectors and the horizontal distribution formula for each of the devolved functions.<sup>63</sup>

However, the absence of a universal standard for determining the vertical resource envelope opens up the possibility for governments to pick and choose what and how much to set aside for decentralised functions (Boex 2013a; 2013b). Depending on the grant type, different models are used in determining the volume of the vertical resources pool, but within the fiscal decentralisation literature four vertical resource envelope measuring instruments are common: percentage-base sharing of national resources between central and local governments; approved local government activity-based expenditures; negotiated annual allocations between central and local governments; and arbitrary central government allocation (Bird, 1990, 1999; Bird and Smart, 2002; Smoke and Kim, 2002; Mogues and Benin, 2012). Sierra Leone opted for the third approach in its vertical resource pool determination, allocations negotiated annually between devolving central government ministries and departments and local councils, with technical backstopping from the local government finance department.<sup>64</sup>

The annual vertical allocations are guided by both existing national spending priorities and the anticipated cost of delivering the devolved functions. While the final vertical allocations are subject to parliamentary approval, section 47 of the Local Government Act guarantees the predictability of the overall vertical resource envelope as allocations are tied to, at minimum, the pre-devolution service delivery standards (MoFED, 2008). The grant has two components: the ‘development’ and ‘recurrent’ allocations. The former is jointly funded by the Government of Sierra Leone and donor partners, whilst the latter is mostly funded by the Government of Sierra Leone and covers the non-salary expenses for devolved functions and the administrative costs of local councils (MoFED, 2010). For each devolved sector, the volume of the vertical pool is determined by the extent of devolution of functions as listed in the statutory instrument. In 2005 – when active devolution commenced – the value of each devolved activity was linked to the equivalent central government expenses for that activity during the previous year. In subsequent years the costs for the existing activities were to rise in proportion to the annual national budgetary increment. The recurrent grant for

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<sup>63</sup> Based on comments during an interview with a senior LGFD economist, MoFED, Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>64</sup> Interview with a senior LGFD economist, Ministry of Finance, Freetown (September, 2014).

administrative costs is calculated annually based on the number of elected councillors, ward committees and core local council employees (MoFED, 2008).

As part of the horizontal distribution of the vertical resource pool, three broad categories of transfers are made annually: ‘administrative’, ‘devolved functions’ and ‘local government development’ grants (LGDG).<sup>65</sup>

**Table 4: Summary of the Horizontal Grant Distribution Formula**

<b>Grant Type/Name</b>	<b>Distribution Criteria</b>
<b>Administrative Grant</b> (recurrent)	1. Council fiscal capacity (OSR generation potential) 2. Number of councillors, WDCs and core staff
<b>Devolved Function Grant:</b> (tied grant)	1. Individual council expenditure need – determined by the number of service delivery infrastructures, e.g. of schools and health centres in a locality
<b>Local Government Development Grant (LGDG)</b>	1. Equal unconditional lump sum to all councils (untied grant) 2. Funding based on viability of a council’s development proposal 3. Performance incentive grant – awarded based on performance in the CLoGPAS

Source: MoFED (2012)

The administrative grant is an ‘equalising grant’ meant to cover the administrative expenses of local councils, including transport and sitting allowances for councillors and other recurrent expenditures. The devolved functions grant, on the other hand, is a tied grant for the delivery of specific devolved functions, such as school fee subsidies and the cleaning of hospitals (Smoke 2006).<sup>66</sup> Until 2012, the local government development grant (LGDG) was designed to support councils to undertake local-level development projects. In 2008, the LGDG was grouped into three categories – discretionary, non-discretionary and performance grants. The performance grant was an incentive for local councils that did well in the first comprehensive local government performance assessment (CLoGPAS), designed to motivate good performance. However, since the CLoGPAS assessment ranking which was originally meant to be an annual exercise was not conducted annually, this grant was later made redundant. The non-discretionary grant, on the other hand, was designed to fund specific local-level development priorities: councils were to develop project proposals within the priority areas of the government’s national development agenda<sup>67</sup> for approval and funding by the finance

<sup>65</sup> Interview with a senior economist at the finance ministry, Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>66</sup> Interview with a senior economist at the finance ministry, Freetown (September, 2014)..

<sup>67</sup> Interview with a senior economist at the finance ministry, Freetown (September, 2014).

ministry. The discretionary grant, as opposed to its non-discretionary counterpart, allowed for some level of autonomy on broader local development priorities such as community centres, markets and local slaughterhouses.

The fragmented nature of the first generation (2004-2010) grant system presented many challenges to attaining fiscal autonomy, equity and fairness in resource allocation.<sup>68</sup> Such challenges necessitated a review of the old grant formula to reflect emerging issues – such as the devolution of additional functions – and to increase the volume of discretionary spending for councils. The philosophy of the second generation grant system was anchored on a commitment to link finance to functions, using client-based expenditure norms and service delivery responsibilities (MoFED, 2012). It also shifted the distribution criteria from the number of public service delivery infrastructures to population, determined by a need-adjusted population (NAP) criterion (MoFED, 2012). Under the new formula, for instance, the Administrative Grant was divided into two categories: Unconditional Block Grants and Administrative Grants. The Development Grant was also divided into two categories: Discretionary Local Development Grants (DLDG) and Sectoral Local Government Development Grants (SLDG).<sup>69</sup>

The criteria determining the need-adjusted population differ between sectors. For primary health services, for instance, the NAP is defined as the weighted population average rate of Peripheral Health Units (PHUs)<sup>70</sup> utilisation (MoFED, 2010). For basic education, the NAP criteria also shifted grant distribution from the number of schools to enrolment figures per local council area (MoFED, 2010). But on a classic economies of scale argument (Moore 1959; Henderson, 2002) in the education ministry for instance, the devolved functions grant for activities such as school fees subsidies and public examinations fees, text books and other teaching aids – previously devolved to local councils – was moved to the education ministry in Freetown for central procurement and onward distribution to local councils.<sup>71</sup> This was done despite the fact that fiscal autonomy has been fully theorised in decentralisation financing as a prerequisite for effective local level service delivery (Bird, 2010; Martinez-Vázquez and Smoke, 2011; Fjeldstad and Heggstad, 2012). But, as the thesis argued in section 4.2.0, the review of the old grant system does not only represent adaptability by the decentralisation actors to reduce red tape and promote local economic development in

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with a lecturer at the University of Sierra Leone, Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>69</sup> See Table 2.

<sup>70</sup> The generic name for public health service delivery centres. See section 5.3.2 and MoFED (2004).

<sup>71</sup> Interview with the Director of Inspectorate, Ministry of Education, Freetown (August, 2014).

fiscal decentralisation, it also provided the opportunity to accommodate the socio-economic and political interest of individual actors, whilst projecting donor-led priorities on the neoliberal marketisation of public services and its transformation of citizens as customers of public services.

The fragmented nature of the first-generation grant formula, on the other hand, resulted in difficult, lengthy and, in some instances, imposing relationships between central government ministries and local councils – who in most instances are powerless in the face of powerful politicians and bureaucrats and whose staff are invariably less knowledgeable about the technicalities of the fiscal devolution. Every year, ‘we begin the grant negotiations with high hopes’, noted a local council chairperson, but by the close of the negotiations, ‘we retire to our fate, ready to accept whatever we can get for our people’.<sup>72</sup> Part of the explanation for such frustration is the fact that local council budgets have to be in line with national development priorities, even where such development priorities are inconsistent with local needs. While there is a formula that stakeholders are aware of and usually trust, in critical situations the authority of national politicians and central bureaucrats prevails. This is partly because members of the Local Government Finance Committee (LGFC), which is responsible for managing and coordinating the fiscal devolution process, are political appointees, and ‘less knowledgeable about local government financing processes.’<sup>73</sup> The influence of such political appointees in determining what and how local councils receive resources, is a major piece in the fiscal decentralisation puzzle in Sierra Leone.

The second-generation grant system was designed to revolutionise the fragmentation and ambiguities of its predecessor.<sup>74</sup> While in many instances it did, in many more the ambiguities persisted. For instance, the local government finance department faces serious constraints in obtaining accurate and timely data on fiscal allocation criteria such as population projection and hospital bed use.<sup>75</sup> The reliance on what the finance ministry refers to as neutral sources of data assumes that such data sources are reliable and thorough. In many instances during fieldwork, local council officials mentioned unfair distribution of resources due to the inaccurate nature of population projections derived from the 2004 population and housing census. In many towns and cities – especially in the booming iron ore mining centres in the northern region – population

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<sup>72</sup> Interview with a local council chairperson – Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>73</sup> Interview with a local council representative member of the LGSC (September, 2014).

<sup>74</sup> See Table 4.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with an economist at the LGFD, Freetown (September, 2014).

figures have surged beyond the 2004 census baseline. And, as the draft preliminary report of Sierra Leone's 2015 housing and population census indicates, the northern region and Port Loko district have surpassed the Western Area and Bo as the most populous region and district in the country (Awoko Newspaper, 1 April, 2016). The data accuracy and timeliness limitations are further challenged by the growing centralisation of functions – such as hospital cleaning and the procurement of teaching and learning materials (TLMs) – hitherto devolved to local councils.<sup>76</sup> Although the emphasis of the second generation grant formula was on service users over service delivery institutions, the shift in emphasis does not allow for what this thesis refers to as 'public service tourism', the temporary movement of people outside their localities of permanent domicile to access services in other local council areas. Within the health sector, for instance, specialist referral hospitals are mostly located in the four major cities of Freetown, Bo, Kenema and Makeni (Walkman, 2013; Conteh, 2016). It follows therefore, that residents of local council areas outside these four major cities may at some point have to rely on health services delivered outside their localities to access crucial health services.

On a rare note of frank acceptance, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) acknowledged the limitations of the grant system in meeting genuine equity requirements in decentralised financing.<sup>77</sup> Due to the lack of reliable data, the grant formula cannot account for specific health characteristics such as infant and maternal mortality rates, calorie deficiency and malnutrition in different categories of people among councils (MoFED, 2012). Allocating resources on user population only fails to consider key health variables that require specialist skills, equipment and training and hence, distinct funding windows (Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF International, 2014).

In addition, the need-adjusted population (NAP) criterion does not properly account for cost variations in service delivery in different localities across the country. Sierra Leone's socio-economic activities, including her political decision-making cadre and service sectors, are mostly centred in Freetown (except for mineral extraction) and the regional cities of Bo, Kenema and Makeni (Jibao and Prichard, 2013). Public services are therefore comparatively better accessed in these cities where the prices of basic commodities are, on average, cheaper than other settlements (Jibao and Prichard, 2013;

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with a local council mayor – Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>77</sup> Interview with a serving permanent secretary, Freetown (August, 2014).

Workman, 2013), making the delivery of similar services in different local council areas costlier outside these major cities. In hard-to-reach local council areas such as Koinadugu, buying office equipment or travel from one location to another, can be twice as expensive as it is in Freetown, for instance:

The distance covered to reach a couple of schools in the mountainous district of Koinadugu will require more resources than needed to supervise all the schools in Makeni City; yet we receive less money for school supervision than Makeni, because Makeni City has got a higher student enrolment population than Koinadugu.<sup>78</sup>

The Koinadugu scenario, for instance, suggests that rather than enforcing a strict commitment to the uncertainties of population and school enrolment dynamics, grant allocation would benefit from a case-by-case assessment of local public service requirements, alongside the local resource mobilisation and management capacity of councils. During field research, there was a consensus among local authorities across the four local council areas that they needed more local revenue generating powers over benevolent transfer of resources from the centre to the periphery. Councils want authority to collect existing taxes and levy new ones – powers that are currently controlled by the central government – to give them true local autonomy to respond to local socio-economic and cohesion priorities. In addition to tax powers, councils preferred an equalisation grant to support councils that are less economically viable to raise resources, even where tax powers were devolved to them.

#### *4.2.1 Local Council Resource Distribution: The Limits of Institutionalism*

Parts seven and eight of the local government act (LGA) provide in broad terms the revenue sources and expenditure framework for local councils. Due to Sierra Leone's post-war economic fragility and the fact that councils' capacity to generate resources was limited at the initial phase of devolution, the LGA (2004:28) further provided for a four-year (2004-2008) window of guaranteed central government funding for devolved functions; it committed to provide the 'amount necessary to continue the operation and maintenance of services at the standard to which they were provided in the year prior to their devolution'. Outside this guaranteed temporary funding window, section 48(1) of the LGA provides for a long-term future for intergovernmental fiscal transfers, grants to be allocated to councils based on their 'relative need and capacity to raise revenue' (LGA, 2004:28).

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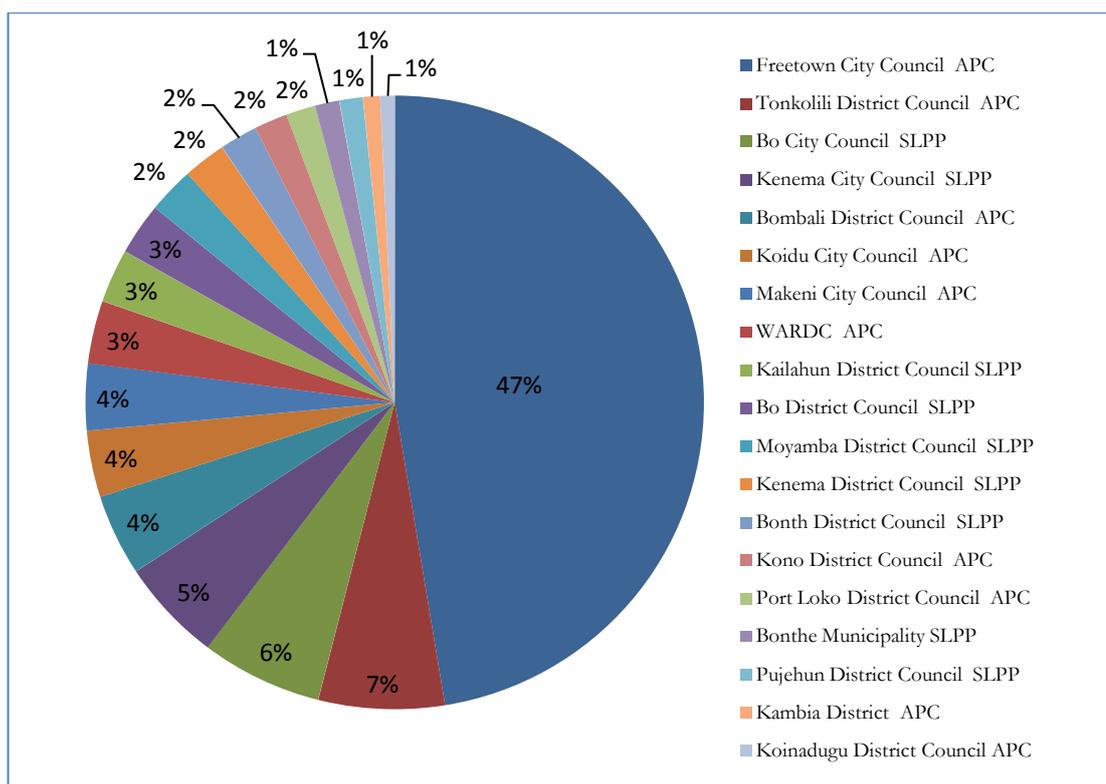
<sup>78</sup> Interview with senior local council official from Koinadugu District Council, Makeni City (October, 2014).

This section argues that despite donor-led efforts at marketisation and commodification of public services (Woodward, 2011; World Bank, 2014), the fiscal devolution formula underestimated the capabilities of national political actors to act shrewdly in the promotion of their interests. It suggests on one level that, regardless of government emphasis on local fiscal autonomy, Sierra Leone's decentralisation fiscal regime appears to be designed to make local councils permanently dependent on central government (and international donors) for funding public services at the local level, rather than providing them with true local fiscal autonomy. On a second level, it argues that, following a critical disaggregation of data from the local government finance department on the horizontal fiscal transfers to both pro-government and pro-opposition local councils from 2005–2013, there is no evidence to suggest a consistent and/or deliberately designed system favouring councils of the ruling party over those of the opposition in intergovernmental fiscal transfers. And, although party politics are crucial in public policy choices, the political party membership of a council's political leaders does not positively correlate with the quantum of financial resources it receives from central government. The data, even when disaggregated to account for the SLPP's management of local councils (2004–2007) and the APC's governance between 2008–2013, shows no significant change in central fiscal allocations to local councils based on their political party affiliation, thus questioning the relevance of the political party affiliation argument and its preference for fiscal technicism in fiscal devolution.

As part of the donor-led push for marketisation of local service delivery, the World Bank emphasised the need for local councils to generate a considerable proportion of their expenses from locally generated revenue sources to increase local discretionary spending (World Bank, 2014). However, own source revenue (OSR) as a percentage of annual councils' expenditure is almost negligible due, in part, to the ambiguities in the local resources mobilisation powers granted to local councils in the collection and sharing of local taxes between local councils and chiefdom authorities. Local revenue generating capacity also varies considerably between councils: while district councils on average generate about 5%, in city councils about 15% of their overall income comes from local revenue mobilisation.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> See Table 3 and Figure 8.



**Figure 8: Local council own-source revenue distribution 2005-2013 (in billion Leones)**

Source: Author's calculation based on MoFED (2014) data.

Almost 50% of councils' total local revenue between 2005 and 2013 was generated by Freetown City Council; there is then a huge gap to Tonkolili District Council (7%) – whose local revenue capacity prior to the huge surface rent from iron ore mining since 2008 was less than 2% of total council revenue – and the city councils of Bo and Kenema at 6% and 5% respectively. Councils' local revenue mobilisation has been improving steadily since the commencement of devolution – from a mere 4.7 billion in 2005, for instance, to 15.5 billion Leones in 2013. However, the increase has not been equal across councils, and has mainly been driven by non-tax revenue.<sup>80</sup> Freetown, Bo and Kenema City Councils have consistently been the highest performers – a situation largely due to the revenue base of the three cities as the country's three major commercial and political centres (Jibao and Prichard, 2013). However, the pace of own source revenue growth in almost all councils has been erratic: for example, Bo City Council's income plummeted from 622 million Leones in 2005 to 520 million in 2008, with only a slight improvement in the following year.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Interview with a senior LGFD economist, Ministry of Finance, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>81</sup> Based on data provided by MoFED 2014 on the intergovernmental fiscal transfer from 2005-2013.

Although the LGA, in principle, empowered councils to collect market dues and licenses and set the local tax rate, in practice the rate was set by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) with little or no consultation with local councils.<sup>82</sup> However, prior to the rollout of decentralisation, chiefdom authorities had sole responsibility for the collection and utilisation of local taxes. The new local tax arrangement proved to be contentious, poorly managed and counterproductive to local revenue mobilisation. Based on the directives of the minister responsible for local government, local taxes were arbitrarily shared on a 40-60% basis between local councils and chiefdom administrations respectively. This was justified by the local government ministry on the basis that local councils have alternative sources of funding which chiefdom authorities do not.<sup>83</sup> This arrangement led to tensions between local councils and chiefdom authorities, leading to criticism of what council authorities referred to as ‘paying chiefs for mobilising votes for politicians’, ‘punishing local councils who are under public scrutiny’ and increased demand for public service delivery.<sup>84</sup> Councils have also argued that there are more ambitious local revenue collection sources such as mining and agricultural taxes from multinational companies, cross-border customs and excise duties, withholding taxes for locally-based companies and cooperatives, etc., which the central government is unwilling to transfer and empower local councils to collect. As well as having their existing local revenue mobilisation authority taken away, councils essentially lacked the power and authority to enforce local tax collection, even when empowered by the central government to do so.

The mechanism for local revenue collection and sharing between chiefdom authorities and local councils is arguably one of the most contentious and ambiguous relationships among actors in the fiscal decentralisation arrangement in Sierra Leone. A pertinent question which many commentators (Fanthorpe et al., 2011; Mbawa, 2012; Jibao and Prichard, 2013; Conteh, 2014) have asked is why did the framers of the LGA agree to such a contentious fiscal decentralisation arrangement, rejecting clearer and far-reaching suggestions during the pre-devolution consultations? Part of the answer is rooted in national politicians’ desire to exercise control over local councils and engage the services of chiefs in vote aggregation at the local level (Fanthorpe et al., 2011). The fact that national politicians can decide to violate the requirements of intergovernmental fiscal relations as provided by the LGA validates the question of why did the donors

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with a local council chairperson, Makeni City (October, 2014).

<sup>83</sup> Interview with the Director of Local Government, MLGRD Freetown (August, 2014).

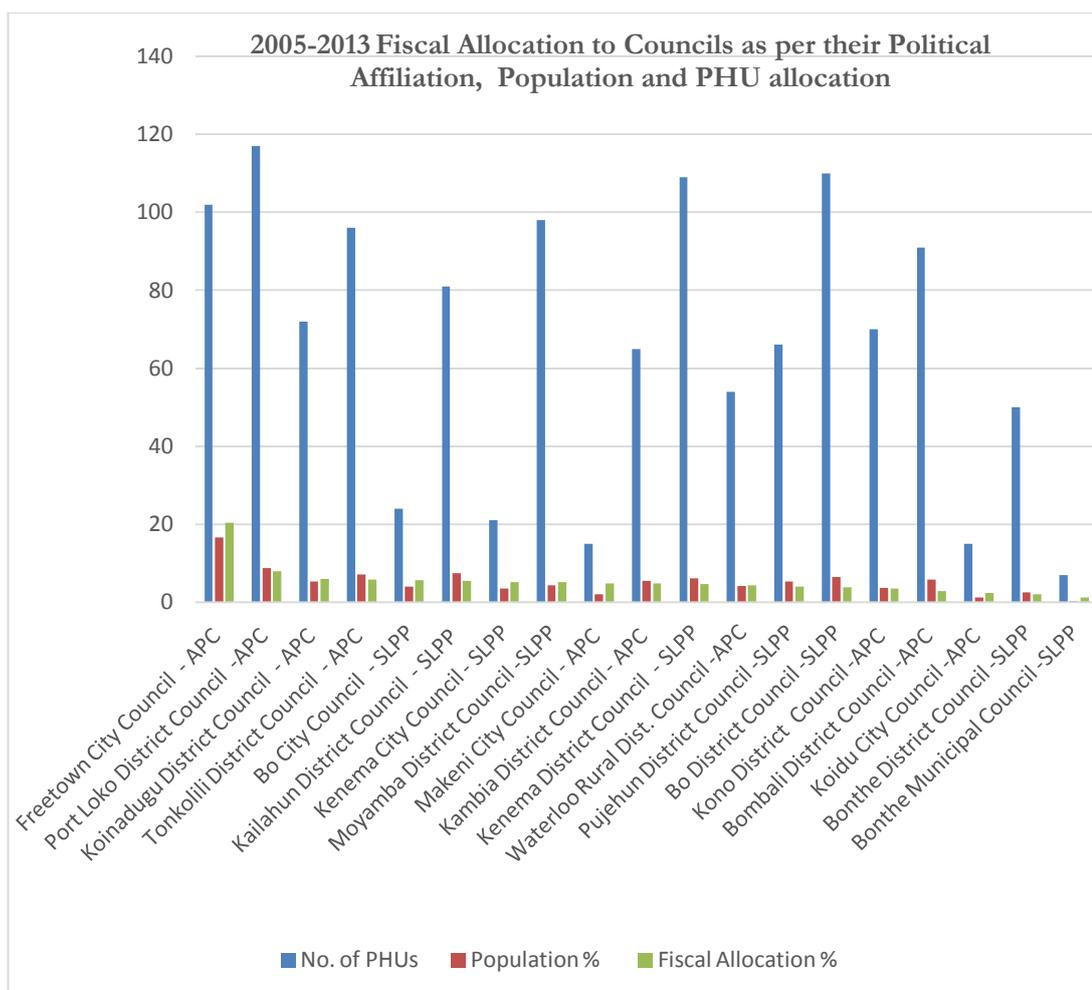
<sup>84</sup> Interview with a local council chief administrator, Bo City (August, 2014).

emphasise the legal and technical safeguards if they would not be respected by local politicians? But, as the deputy local government minister argued, it is important that central government sets the local tax rate because, if the government devolves such a function, each council will set its own rate, leading to confusion and disparity among councils and ‘that will affect the way we govern...we need some leverage over councils at the national level’.<sup>85</sup> The deputy minister’s argument seems to make a lot of sense regarding tax uniformity; but does the local tax need to be uniform? If tax uniformity matters, was this an oversight or a limitation of formulaic processes when the LGA states that councils are to set the local tax rate in their localities? These questions bring to the fore the hasty nature in which the LGA was passed, without a national policy codifying government’s overreaching priorities and vision for decentralisation.

It is no surprise therefore, that the low input of locally generated revenue to the operating budgets of local councils became symptomatic of the limitations of fiscal devolution and the public service delivery challenges across the country. While councils’ own source revenue accounts for about 25% of total expenditures in the city councils of Bo and Freetown, in Koinadugu and Moyamba district councils it is less than 5%.

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with the deputy local government minister, Freetown (August, 2014).



**Figure 9: Political affiliation, population, PHU distribution and intergovernmental fiscal allocations**

Source: Author's calculation based on LGFD data.

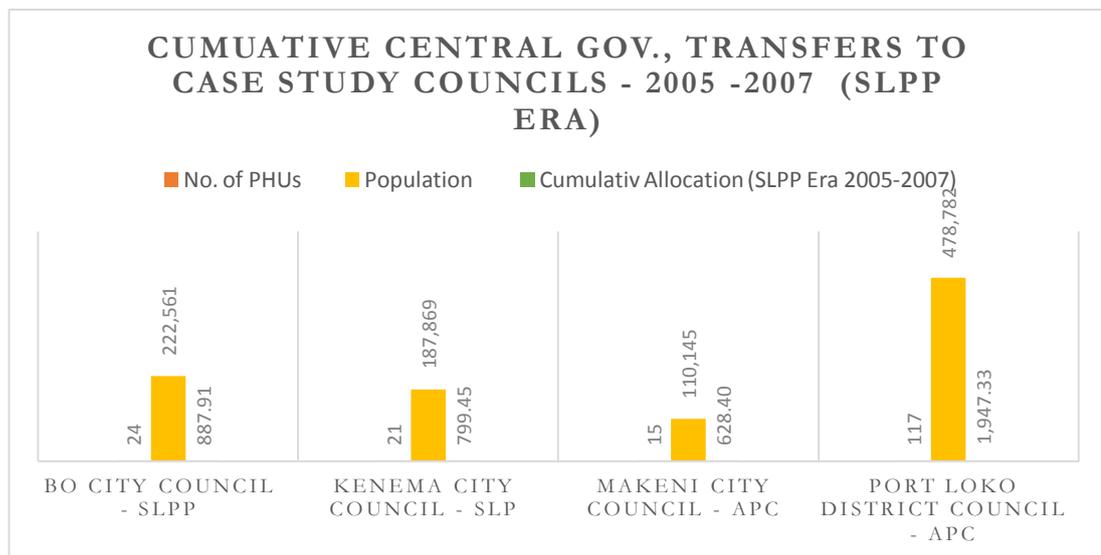
However, among senior officials within the ministries of finance and local government, there is a growing consensus that local councils under-report their true locally generated revenue in order to attract more from central government.<sup>86</sup> Unfortunately, there is no concrete evidence to substantiate or refute such a claim, as there are no tax audits or real time tax projections for local councils. However, a local government finance officer acknowledged that often finance officers are ‘under pressure from mayors and chairpersons’ to under-report councils’ true local revenue capacity ‘as big councils with strong own source revenue (OSR) capacity tend to receive less development funding than smaller councils’.<sup>87</sup> The low OSR output among local councils suggests they are largely dependent on central government and external donors to fund local public

<sup>86</sup> Interview with a senior LGFD economist, Ministry of Finance, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>87</sup> Interview with a local government finance officer, Bo City (October, 2014).

services: the combined OSR of local councils from 2007 to 2013 accounts for less than 30% of their total income.<sup>88</sup>

As Figure 8 indicates, councils’ local revenue generation capacity differs significantly. Freetown City Council, for instance, generates close to 50% of the combined OSR of all councils, while three of the top four own source revenue generating councils are all city councils. However, this is not the case for central government transfers. Three of the four top earners of central transfers are all district councils – with Freetown City Council being the only exception. In terms of cumulative income (own-source and central transfers), Freetown City Council is the top earner, followed by Port Loko and Tonkolili District Councils in second and third, and Bo City Council in fourth position, respectively. The top three councils with the most resources are all controlled by the All Peoples’ Congress Party – the governing party since September 2007.<sup>89</sup>

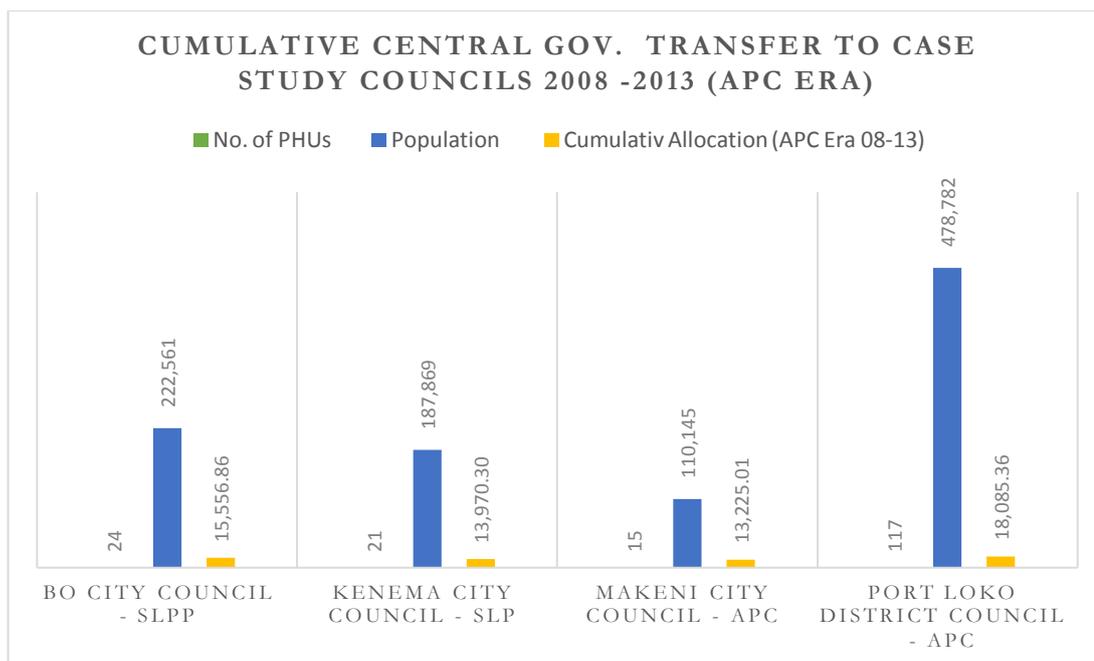


**Figure 10: Political affiliation, population, PHU distribution and intergovernmental fiscal allocations (2005-2007)**

Source: Author’s calculation based on LGFD data.

<sup>88</sup> See Table 4 above.

<sup>89</sup> As indicated in Figure 8 and Table 4 above.



**Figure 11: Political affiliation, population, PHU distribution and intergovernmental fiscal allocations (2008 -2013)**

Source: Author's calculation based on LGFD data.

The evidence in Figure 9 above appears to validate the political affiliation claim (Hibbs, 1992; Schmidt, 1996 Ahmad et al., 2005, van Wyk, 2007) as it suggests that councils run by the ruling party receive more central government transfers than those of the opposition. However, since population – among other variables – is a crucial variable in the allocation formula, the grant distribution above should not be taken at face value, partly because it does not provide a clear correlation between a council's population and its central government allocation. For instance, it does not explain why the pro-government district councils of Tonkolili and Koinadugu, and the pro-opposition Bo City Council receive more in central government grants than Kailahun District Council – an opposition council with more population than the four councils above. It also does not explain why Bo, Kailahun, Kenema, and Moyamba councils (all pro-opposition councils) receive more central government transfers than the pro-ruling party city council of Makeni (the home of the President and an APC stronghold) and other pro-government councils such as Kambia and Waterloo district councils.

Whilst the councils with the most central government transfers (see Figure 9) are all pro-government, their fortunes have not changed since the APC came to power in September, 2007. Figure 10 clearly indicates that among the four case study councils, Port Loko District Council has consistently received more resources than its comparators, even before the APC party – to which the council is affiliated – came to

power in late 2007. Figures 10 and 11 also collectively show that the opposition city councils of Bo and Kenema receive more resources than the ruling party-controlled Makeni City Council, even after the APC came to power in 2007. The evidence in Figures 9, 10 and 11 all points to a much more complex web of relationships and motivations for intergovernmental fiscal transfers beyond a simplistic political affiliation argument. The evidence suggests a multiplicity and interplay of context-specific factors that influence fiscal devolution choices. Neither political affiliation nor the supposedly neutral technicist illusion of institutionalism seem to be relevant explanatory variables. This is, in part, because the technocratic approach tells a single story about decentralisation, public service delivery and social cohesion, for a concept and context with several, and most times, competing story lines.

Beyond central government funding, councils also receive substantial support from local and international development agencies. The two main donor-funded projects for local public services, for instance, are the Decentralised Services Delivery Programme (DSDP) and the Reproductive Health Project (RHP). Both projects provide counterpart funding for selected devolved sectors, channelled through the Ministry of Finance and distributed using the agreed horizontal grant formula for each sector. Apart from this, other councils also receive direct funding from donor partners for various development projects. The EU, for instance, has funded an Urban Planning and Development Project in Freetown, a Local Tax Cadastral Mapping project in Bo and a Health Sector Support Project in Moyamba.<sup>90</sup> The guiding principle from the finance ministry is for councils to declare their actual and/or anticipated resources such that, where possible, this will be factored into the annual vertical resource envelope. However, apart from the minimal local tax projections, councils are less enthusiastic in reporting other funding sources and the finance ministry only has a financial supervisory role; it ‘cannot compel councils to do otherwise... that’s the role of the local government ministry’, concluded a top finance ministry civil servant.<sup>91</sup> Also, it is not uncommon for the President of Sierra Leone to make personal pledges to fund specific projects that are not part of the annual horizontal resource allocation for a particular council or locality whereby the cost of funding such projects is paid for by the national treasury. In Makeni, for instance, a primary school – the President’s alma mater – was renovated by the Makeni City

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with the Social Affairs Officer - EU, Sierra Leone Country Delegation Office, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>91</sup> Interview with a senior Ministry of Finance employee, Freetown (October, 2014).

Council with funds from the finance ministry, following a pledge the President made during the school's anniversary celebrations.<sup>92</sup>

Perhaps the most glaring limitation of the local government grant system in Sierra Leone is the management and allocation of the local government development grant (LGDG). The first performance incentive grant was awarded to councils in 2007, on the basis of the 2006 local councils' performance assessment (CLOGPAS) ranking. Anticipating this to be an annual event, councils were believed to have tried to influence the outcome of subsequent CLOGPAS evaluations to increase their rankings in the league table and eventually their access to the incentive grant.<sup>93</sup> During the 2008 GLOGPAS evaluation in Makeni, for instance, one of the enumerators was replaced after being accused of deliberately awarding unrealistic points to Makeni City Council and not properly following the evaluation procedures.<sup>94</sup> When the final evaluation report was published, its validity was questioned by a number of councils on the suspicion that there was a calculated attempt to influence the performance outcome of Makeni City Council.<sup>95</sup>

Following the 2008 CLOGPAS manipulation allegations, the performance grant was terminated. However, the discretionary and non-discretionary local government development grants were maintained. Each year, the finance ministry sets out the priority areas for the non-discretionary local government development grant, ranging from the maintenance of feeder roads to supporting farmers' associations. The discretionary grant, unlike other grants, is not determined by NAP criteria. Instead, councils can only access the grant through a competitive bidding process based on compelling local-needs projects and priorities for consideration and funding by the Ministry of Finance. But in a polarised socio-political context – such as Sierra Leone – the process of determining which project is funded and which is not is dependent on a number of patron-client networks beyond the simplistic narrative of political affiliation. According to data from the local government finance department (LGFD) on the intergovernmental fiscal transfers,<sup>96</sup> in the 2008 local development grant allocation, for

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with a senior Ministry of Finance employee, Freetown (October, 2014).

<sup>93</sup> Interview with senior official of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit of DecSec, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>94</sup> Interview with senior official of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit of DecSec, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>95</sup> Interview with senior official of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit of DecSec, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>96</sup> Received from a senior LGFD official via email (August, 2014).

instance, whilst the two pro-opposition councils of Bo (City and District) – with a combined population of 570,171 residents – received 471 million Leones (5.3% of annual local government development grant allocations), Port Loko District Council – aligned with the ruling APC party and with a population of 478,782 residents – received 808 million Leones, or 9.1% of total local development grant allocation for the year. But by the same token, both Bo and Kenema City Councils individually received more development grant than the ruling party councils of Koinadugu (with a population of 288,670, higher than both Bo and Kenema cities) and Makeni received individually.

The disparity in resource allocation alongside the high degree of discretionary authority exercised by public sector bureaucrats over fiscal management suggests that decentralisation is unavoidably vulnerable to socio-political processes. And, as Willis et al. (1999:8) argue, decentralisation has a ‘discernible political logic’ based on the political bargaining of the ruling coalitions and ‘lines of accountability’ for public bureaucrats. Because each actor has a vested interest and constituency to satisfy, decentralisation cannot be treated as a technically neutral process without context and stakes (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001). Within the corridors of the finance ministry, for instance, the Chairman of the Port Loko District Council is nicknamed ‘Mr Powerful Chairman’, a title which demonstrates his ability to secure funding for projects for his local council area. Much of his influence is not necessarily attributed to his skills in writing good project proposals, nor his APC party affiliation, but rather his family relationship with the Financial Secretary – the professional head of the Ministry of Finance, whose signature is needed for the approval of projects and transfer of funds to local councils – and who happens to be a fellow tribesman from Masimera chiefdom in the Port Loko district.<sup>97</sup>

However, some observers of Sierra Leone’s fiscal decentralisation process have argued that the Port Loko scenario is simply one of population and need-based dynamics and not necessarily party politics or family connections. ‘No council can be more APC and more connected than Makeni City Council, yet Bo City Council constantly has higher central government allocations than Makeni’, noted one local government observer.<sup>98</sup> But, as this thesis argues in Chapter Six, being an opposition council does not necessarily suggest a lack of access to state resources as actors connect at different levels

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with a senior finance ministry employee, Freetown (October, 2014).

<sup>98</sup> Interview with a senior economics lecturer of the University of Sierra Leone, Freetown (September, 2014).

and for different purposes and politicians most often embark on targeted spending in ‘opposition strongholds... in an effort to induce them with development benefits’ (Abdulai and Hickey, 2016:45). What is, perhaps, much clearer from Sierra Leone’s intergovernmental fiscal landscape, is a contradiction between the professed commitment by the Government of Sierra Leone and its donor partners to fiscal autonomy for local councils (LGA, 2004; Woodward, 2011; Boex, 2013a; Jibao and Prichard, 2013; Conteh, 2014), and councils’ heavy dependence on central government resources – a contradiction Smoke (2006:213) described as a challenge of graduating ‘sub-national governments from extreme dependency on central government and donor funding, to local independent sources of funding’. Perhaps the questions yet to be asked are: did the international community properly understand the intentions of local political elites when they chose to decentralise, or did donor agencies – in their quest to push for a neoliberal governance reform project – ignore the fine link between the transfers of functions to local councils together with the required revenue generation authority?

#### **4.3 Local Councils’ Management Performance Assessment**

By 2006, some devolved sectors – especially education and health – had made considerable progress in the transfer of functions, assets and personnel to local councils. In addition to this, the World Bank had rolled out a \$24 million grant in support of capacity building interventions and public financial management for decentralisation through the Institutional Reform and Capacity Building Project (IRCBP) (Gaima, 2009). The extent of devolution and the quantum of donor financial support to local councils necessitated the design and implementation of performance assessment frameworks to evaluate progress and show the (consistent with international standards of decentralised service delivery evaluation) results of the huge international and national investment in decentralisation (Ekpo, 2007). In response, two assessment toolkits emerged: the Comprehensive Local Government Performance Assessment Survey (CLOGPAS) and the Integrated National Public Services Survey (INPSS). This section analyses the provisions and limitations of the two evaluation toolkits in relation to their assessment of councils’ management performance and service delivery output relative to the volume of their central fiscal transfers and their political party leaning. It does so by comparing a council’s share of central fiscal allocation and its performance management ranking. It argues that the evaluation methodologies of both assessment toolkits are flawed, inconsistent and primarily serve the interest of external donors, and not the

principal–agent accountability promise of decentralisation (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001; Ahmad et al., 2005; Lockwood, 2005). It further suggests that there is no reasonably positive correlation between a council’s quantum of central fiscal transfer and its performance management ranking.

The CLoGPAS was developed in 2006 by the Decentralisation Secretariat, with technical support from the World Bank. Based on two evaluation dimensions, Minimum Conditions (MCs) and Performance Measures (PMs), it was intended to be a management compliance and accountability framework for councils, devolved ministries and sectors, and other actors in the decentralisation process. The evaluation process is coordinated by a multi-taskforce technical committee from the World Bank-funded IRCBP programme and representatives of the ministry responsible for local government. The detailed evaluation questionnaires and other documents are reviewed and validated through a joint validation workshop between councils and the Decentralisation Secretariat (DecSec), while the data collection process is done by hired enumerators.<sup>99</sup> This methodology has been heavily criticised by both councils and civil society groups, who perceive the design as exclusive to DecSec and its donors, without meaningful public input.<sup>100</sup> In 2011, after two rounds of CLoGPAS in 2006 and 2008, heavy public criticism of CLoGPAS’s lack of inclusivity, and with the devolution of additional functions to councils, a set of new competencies were incorporated, with adjustments to some of the Minimum Conditions and Performance Measures.<sup>101</sup> The new instrument, used in the 2011 and 2013 evaluations, incorporated public service delivery components such as education, health, local economic development (LED), gender and ward development committee activities, but failed to include active civil society oversight in the evaluation process (DecSec, 2013).

The scoring pattern for the GLoGPAS’s minimum assessment conditions required councils to meet all the indicators in every thematic area. In the 2006 and 2008 evaluations there were only two outcomes for each thematic area: *met* or *not met*. If a council provided evidenced-based answers for all questions linked to a thematic area in an indicator, the minimum condition would be considered to have been met. If all the questions in a thematic area were not answered positively, then the minimum condition

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<sup>99</sup> Interview with a senior staff member of the M&E Unit of DecSec, Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>100</sup> Almost all LC authorities interviewed as part of this study described the CLoGPAS as a process imposed from above with which they had to comply.

<sup>101</sup> For instance, after the recruitment of 14 core staff in all 19 local councils, the availability of a local government finance officer as a criterion for the MC on functional capability in budget and accounting became obsolete.

for that thematic area would be considered not met. In 2011, a compromise agreement was reached to allow for a *partially met* outcome when over 50% of the questions were satisfactorily answered. For the Performance Measures, a point is given for each evaluation question that has an evidence-based yes answer. Unfortunately, the decision as to what constituted an evidenced-based answer and what did not was left to the discretion of the survey enumerators.

Following the 2010 review of the CLoGPAS evaluation toolkit, service delivery indicators for devolved sectors and other local deliverables were incorporated into the evaluation instrument. However, the process of determining the indicators in each thematic area, and the allocation of assessment points, did not follow any scientific methodology or justification. In the 2011 assessment, for instance, a total of 53 points were allocated to the new competencies, whilst in the 2013 evaluation the allocated points for the same competencies increased to 64 (DecSec, 2011). The number of points in a thematic area is dependent on the number of questions in that area and, apparently, there was no justifiable rationale for asking more questions in one thematic area and in the process awarding more points to one thematic area over another. For instance, in a thematic area like gender, there might be three questions while in another thematic area – say education – there might be seven or eight.

Both the Minimum Conditions and the performance measures were developed against the backdrop of how councils ought to perform – premised on so-called ‘international best practice’ – and not how councils can, and should perform, based on local capacity and needs with an emphasis on traditional public social services (such as health and education), and less on issues that deal with systems and socio-cultural change, such as gender equity.<sup>102</sup> Part of the problem is rooted in an idealistic assumption of a universal governance reform toolkit, shaped by western notions of bureaucratic institutional compliance (Steger and Roy, 2010; Marriage, 2013). The model failed to incorporate views from council authorities and the public on the preferred structure of local governance and public expectations of it, thus making the CLoGPAS a toolkit of the World Bank and the decentralisation secretariat on how to ‘evaluate councils’ performance, and not how councils should be accountable to ordinary citizens’.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Interview with an Observer of Sierra Leone’s decentralisation project, Freetown (September, 2014)

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

Although the CLoGPAS was expected to be an annual performance assessment of councils, at the time of writing only four assessments have been carried out – 2006, 2008, 2011, and 2013. Such inconsistency shows that service delivery progress cannot be tracked on an annual basis. The decentralisation secretariat has blamed the lack of predictable funding and other national priorities (such as local and national elections and the 2014 Ebola outbreak) as key weaknesses in the process.<sup>104</sup> However, the decentralisation secretariat itself remains critical about the rationale of annual assessments as most councils are rarely fully prepared by the time the assessment is conducted.

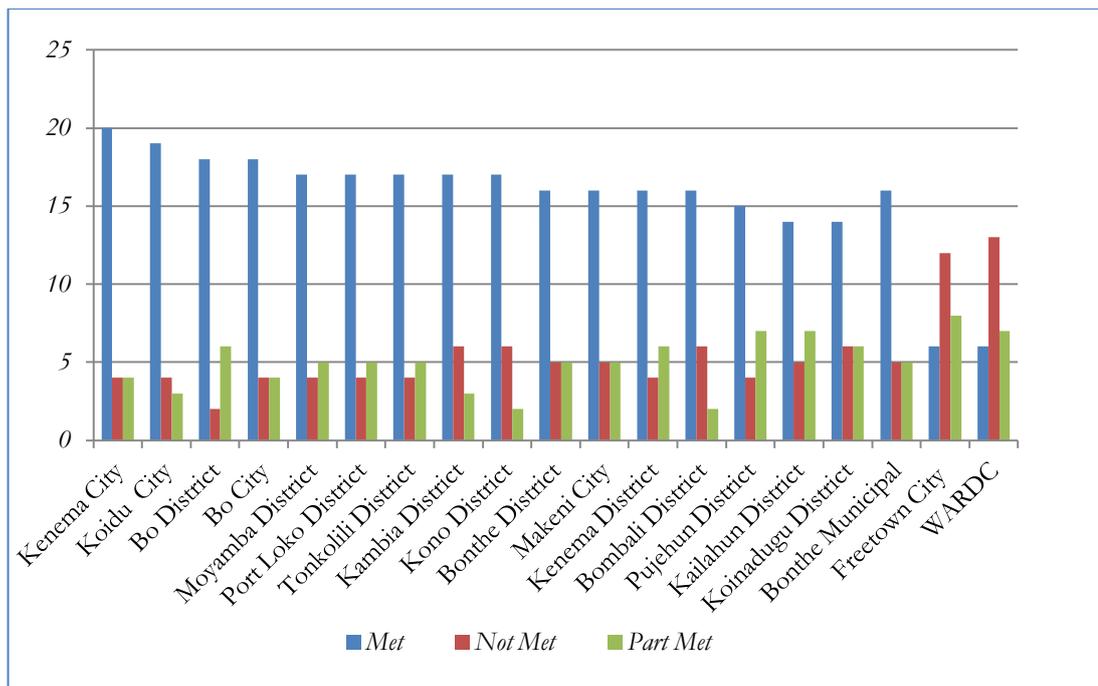
The CLoGPAS has also been widely criticised for its lack of reliability and trustworthiness. In its 2013 evaluation report, for instance, Bo City believed that the evaluation results were manipulated in favour of councils of the ruling APC party over pro-opposition councils: ‘Bo came first in all the Minimum Conditions, winning five out of the eight different awards. How is it possible we are ranked fifth overall? It is clear there is an orchestrated plan to discredit Bo City’.<sup>105</sup>

Such credibility challenges are not unheard of in the performance management and evaluation processes of local government entities in Africa. Theskildsen (2006; in Bangura and Larbi, 2006:12) noted that similar evaluation techniques have been discontinued in the continent because politicians are worried that senior state bureaucrats will use them to build ‘personal empires’, ‘regional cliques’ and ‘ethnic enclaves’.

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with the Director of DecSec, Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015)



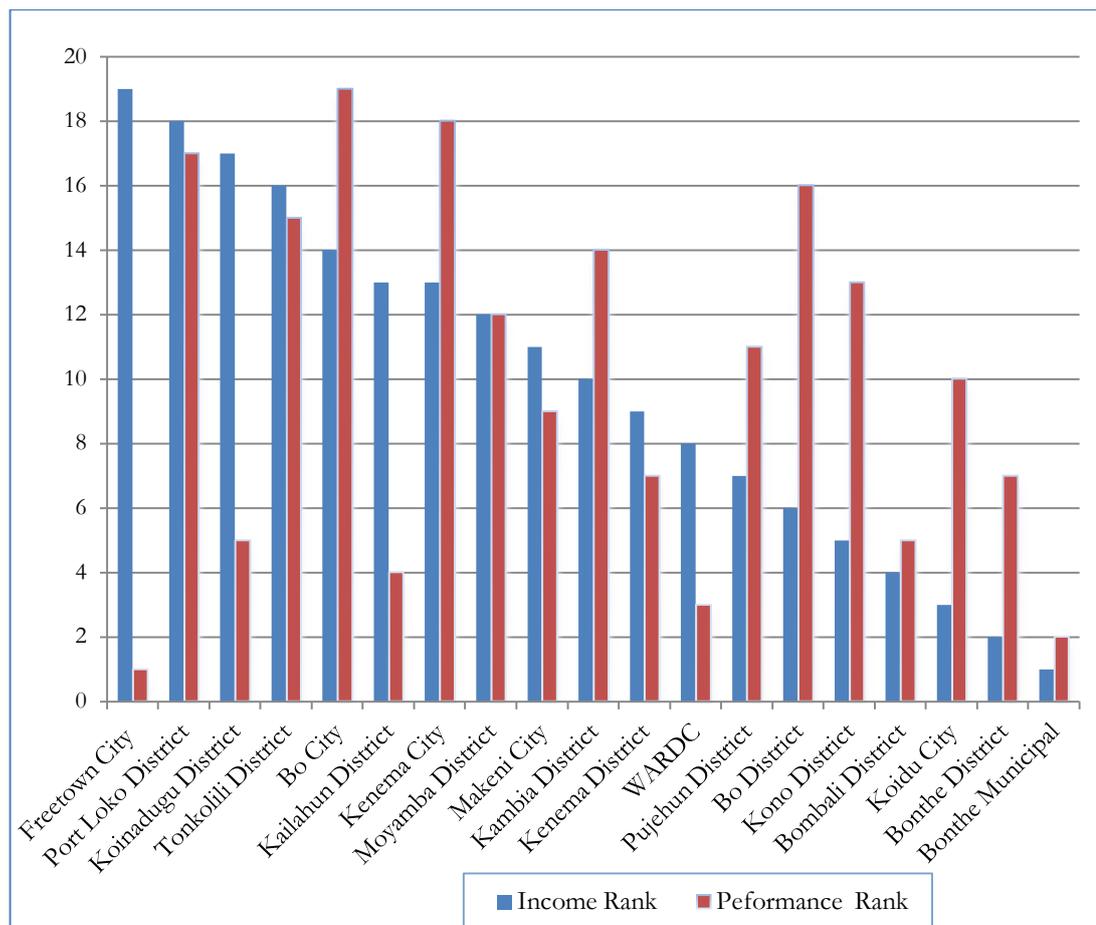
**Figure 12: CLoGPAS' minimum condition ranking of local councils**

Source: Author's calculation based on the four CLoGPAS reports.

This study acknowledges the methodological limitations of the CLoGPAS assessment instrument but, in the absence of any other credible alternative, the research compiled and analysed the four evaluations conducted so far to provide an indication of the overall performance management ranking of local councils. It should be noted that since 2012, the Office of the President has run a performance management contracting system for all ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), including local councils. However, this is based on targets set by the MDAs and does not include the functional capacity and institutional arrangement of local councils or public perception. This thesis therefore focused on those assessment tools established by the official agencies responsible for evaluating council performance. Based on the cumulative Minimum Conditions of CLoGPAS evaluation analysis, (see Figure 10), the pro-opposition (SLPP) City Council of Kenema emerged as the best performing council, followed by the pro-ruling party (APC) City Council of Koidu , with the two pro-opposition Bo councils (city and district) tying in third position. At the bottom of the Minimum Conditions performance table are Koinadugu, Bonthe, and Freetown and Waterloo Rural District councils - all aligned with the ruling APC party. Three of the top four performers are pro-opposition (Kenema and the two Bo councils), however, Koidu City Council – a pro-governing party council – is the second-best performing council on the CLoGPAS's minimum conditions. Of the four case study councils, the opposition city

councils of Bo and Kenema are in the top four, whilst the ruling councils of Port Loko and Makeni are ranked sixth and eleventh respectively.

It should be noted, however, that the Minimum Conditions ranking of a council is not a reliable indicator for its overall performance management ranking.<sup>106</sup> Beyond the papering over of the cracks done by the CLoGPAS evaluation figures, a critical look at the evaluation figures offers several lenses of analytical interpretations of both the methodology of the toolkit and council performance dynamics.



**Figure 13: Councils' income versus their cumulative CLoGPAS ranking**

Source: Author's calculation based on the four CLoGPAS reports.

While the two Bo councils are cumulatively the best performing councils, there is no clear link between a council's ratings on the Minimum Conditions and performance measures and its public service delivery output. For instance, Koidu City and Kono District Councils (both pro-government councils) are ranked among the four best performers in both the Minimum Conditions and the performance measures, but they both ranked below average in key service delivery sectors (DecSec, 2011, 2013). Part of

<sup>106</sup> See Figure 10.

the problem lies with the evaluation methodology and its arbitrary allocation of indicators and grading system for the various thematic areas. Mathematically, a council can do well in one highly rated performance condition, and perform poorly in two lowly rated conditions yet emerge as the best overall performer due to the points allocation system. The methodology is akin to the United States of America presidential elections: it is better to win in one big state with 30 Electoral College votes for instance, than in two small states with 10 votes each.

Based on the cumulative performance grading of all 19 local councils,<sup>107</sup> the pro-opposition city councils of Bo and Kenema have consistently been the best performers despite not receiving the highest sums of money from central government, whilst the pro-ruling party council of Freetown – with the highest resources – has consistently been the worst performing council. The findings raise a number of questions about the rationale of fiscal institutionalism and council service delivery output. Does the fiscal formula miss something? Is money not a positive incentive for performance? Why is it that the best performing councils are opposition-led whilst the worst are pro-government?

Beyond the challenges of these unanswered questions above, the analyses of the quantum of intergovernmental fiscal transfer versus councils' cumulative performance rankings also indicates the lack of a reasonable correlation between the political party affiliation of a council's elected political leadership and the quantum of central government transfers it receives. Whilst the four top recipients of central government transfers are all pro-current government councils, their fortunes did not change when the APC won power in 2007. Freetown City, Port Loko, Koinadugu and Tonkolili District Councils were also the highest earning councils between 2004-2007 when the, now opposition, Sierra Leone People's Party was in power. The analysis also does not explain why pro-opposition councils such as Bo and Kenema City receive more central government transfers than Makeni City Council, for instance. Whilst acknowledging the role of party politics as an important explanatory variable – especially regarding the distribution of the discretionary local government development grant – the fact that opposition councils seems to be consistently outperforming ruling party councils, and that some opposition councils receive more central government transfers than ruling party ones, questions the validity of the political affiliation claim and its preference for

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<sup>107</sup> See Figure 12.

neoliberal institutionalism (Ahmad et al., 2005; Bovens et al., 2006; Steger and Roy, 2010; Marriage, 2013). The empirical evidence suggests that there are complex networks of relationships which influence public policy choices and the distribution of resources and services across the country, beyond a simplistic political affiliation dichotomy.

#### *4.3.1 National Public Services Survey – Public Perception of Local Governance and Service Delivery*

The National Public Services Survey (NPSS), like the CLoGPAS, is an evaluation instrument developed by the decentralisation secretariat under the World Bank-funded IRCBP initiative. Unlike the CLoGPAS, the NPSS is a citizens' perception survey on access to and satisfaction with the quality of services, and trust in government officials (DecSec, 2012). Since its inception in 2005, four rounds have been conducted – 2005, 2007, 2008 and 2011.<sup>108</sup> The four surveys covered 6,341 nationally representative households in 635 enumeration areas stratified at local council level across the country (DecSec, 2010).<sup>109</sup> The 2005 NPSS was conducted alongside the initial rollout of the Local Government Act and provided baseline data for performance assessment of local councils in public service delivery. The survey collates useful information on peoples' knowledge of and interest in governance, including their knowledge of the differences between the three layers of government (central, local and chiefdom) and their level of participation in local decision-making processes. However, the emphasis on citizens' voices and holding leaders to account as the hallmark of the public perception survey (as opposed to the council-centric CLoGPAS) fell far short of fully bringing on board the critical mass needed to create a vibrant and active civil society. In the four surveys, the average age of respondents was over 40, with young people (0-35) accounting for less than 40% of total respondents (DecSec, 2012), even though they constitute just over 50% of the country's population (Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF International, 2014). The surveys (other than the first in 2005) were concentrated within the same enumeration areas, interviewing the same respondents – mostly male heads of households or their spouses.

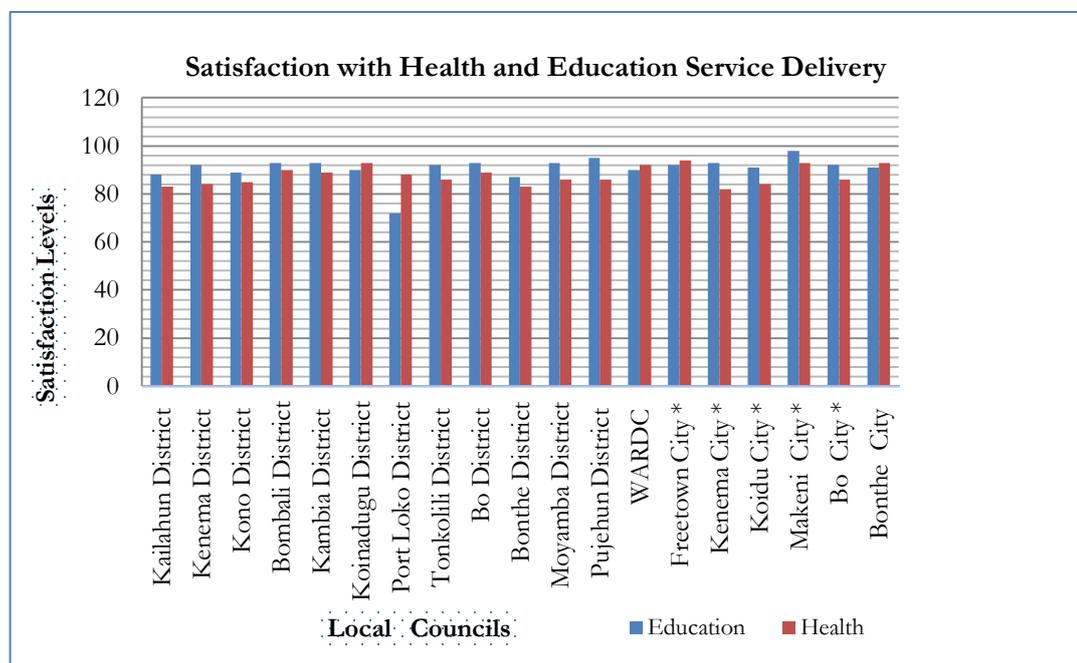
In 2011, the NPSS was integrated with the Schools Service Survey (SSS), the Service Delivery Perception Survey (SDPS) and Peripheral Health Units Survey (PHUS) – previously conducted separately to monitor and evaluate the progress and quality of services in these sectors – to form the Integrated National Public Service Survey

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<sup>108</sup> The 2005, 2007 and 2008 were all conducted as NPSS. The 2011 was the first combined INPSS.

<sup>109</sup> Enumeration areas are developed by Statistics Sierra Leone with approximately 100 households in each enumeration area (see DecSec, 2012b).

(INPSS), making the INPSS one of the first cross-sectional time series surveys of this scale to be conducted in post-war Sierra Leone (DecSec, 2012a). The ambitious nature of the INPSS meant that its questionnaire had about 800 questions and took nearly two hours to complete. Conducted at the peak of the rainy season, enumerators faced challenges in getting respondents to take part – especially rural farmers – and when they did, noted one INPSS enumerator, respondents were afraid of critiquing their local public officials in open interviews like the INPSS.<sup>110</sup> Like the CLoGPAS, the INPSS was designed to be an annual exercise whose results were expected to feed into accountability reforms and governance interaction processes. Unfortunately, at the time of writing, only four surveys have been conducted.



**Figure 14: Household satisfaction levels with public service delivery (Health and Education)**

Source: Author’s calculation based a cumulative analysis of the four INPSS surveys \*Figures include only the 2005 NPSS.

Based on data from the four perception surveys, this study compiled household satisfaction levels on the use and ease of access to two public service utilities: primary health and basic education.

Public perception of local leaders’ responsiveness to community needs and trust in public financial management dropped from 66% in 2006 to 37% in 2011 (DecSec, 2012). During the same period, the percentage of respondents who believed that council authorities are transparent and non-corruptible in managing public funds fell from 18% to 6%. The national household perception average on the influence of local

<sup>110</sup> Comments from an interview with an INPSS enumerator, Freetown (September, 2014).

councils in peoples' daily lives is 37%, while the national mean on the level of household trust in public financial management by local councils is 1.06 (DecSec, 2012). However, households in rural local council communities have a higher dependency on and use of publicly funded utilities than those in towns and cities.

A plausible explanation for the service use variation between rural and urban settlements is partly due to income variations and the availability of alternative health care and education services – such as private schools and hospitals in cities. The INPSS data present variations between public perceptions on council performance and the CLoGPAS ranking of the four case study councils. Whilst Bo and Kenema City Councils are among the upper echelons of the performance management rankings, Makeni City Council has the highest public satisfaction ratings, followed by Kenema, Bo and Port Loko respectively.

From the cumulative data illustrated in Figure 14, it appears that people are highly satisfied with local public services and the responsiveness of their local leaders. However, during focus group discussions (FGDs) and 'hang-out', people complained bitterly about the inferior quality of and challenges in accessing public services – especially unexplained charges for services officially designated as free:

We pay for everything...even when the government says medicine is free for us: if I don't bring money to the clinic, I will bring a litre of palm oil, rice or chicken, otherwise the nurse will not give me medicine.<sup>111</sup>

Similar comments were echoed across the four councils in this study, repeating the extortion of impoverished rural people by public servants as they struggled to access public services. However, rural Sierra Leoneans are hesitant to criticise public officials, especially in official interviews: they are more confident and forthcoming when the book is closed and the recorder switched off.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter explored the possibility of a correlation between a council's political affiliation, its access to central government resources and its overall service delivery and management performance ranking. It began with a critical analysis of Sierra Leone's public sector, locating the share of local public services in the national budget and the intergovernmental fiscal transfer system. The aim was to link a council's political

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<sup>111</sup> Comments by a breastfeeding mother in an FGD at Buya Romende Village (September, 2014).

affiliation, share of public sector budget, service delivery outcomes and performance management rankings. The public sector profile that emerged points to a bigger local public sector than suggested by central transfers to local councils alone. However, the decision to spend most resources meant for local public services at the central level opens up a series of questions on the motivations of politicians and public bureaucrats, and the validity of the political affiliation claim and its neoliberal institutional formulaic compliance approach in fiscal decentralisation in the developing world.

From the chapter's analysis, a number of conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, whilst local councils with a large revenue base, high population density and public service delivery institutions (such as Freetown, Port Loko, Bo and Tonkolili) emerged as the highest income earners from central transfers, there is no correlation between a council's overall resources and its service delivery and management performance ratings. Bo and Kenema City Councils – ranked fifth and seventh in central government transfers, and third and fourth in own source revenue mobilisation respectively – emerged as the best performing councils over higher resource-earners such as Freetown, Tonkolili and Port Loko. Secondly, even though the top three resource-earning councils are all pro-government, there is no consistent correlation between a council's political affiliation and the quantum of resources it receives from the central government – a situation which explains why pro-opposition councils such as Bo and Kenema receive more central government transfers than Makeni, for instance. In fact, what seems to be consistent is the fact that the two opposition councils in this study have higher management performance and service delivery rankings than their two ruling party counterparts.

Also, despite the fact that the grant distribution formula appears acceptable to all parties and does not seem to overtly favour one set of councils over another in regard to their political affiliation, the supposedly apolitical nature of the fiscal institutions failed to capture context-specific realities such as kinship and local traditional intricacies (discussed in detail in Chapters Six and Seven) that influence policy choices and local governance financing complexities outside the strict party politics dichotomy. The fact that the service delivery responsibilities of local councils are inconsistent with their revenue mobilisation authority, despite government and donor commitment towards fiscal autonomy of local councils, indicates a deliberate attempt to make councils perpetually dependent on central government for resources and support, and eventual

central government control: as the old adage states, 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'.

## Chapter Five

### **Decentralisation and Public Service Delivery: Progress, Processes and Challenges**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

The decentralisation consensus among political elites after the civil war in Sierra Leone was unprecedented considering that decentralisation presupposes some form of power and resources transfer from central to lower tiers of government (Boone, 2003). With over 58 of the 80 functions earmarked for devolution partly or fully devolved and the core local government technical and administrative machinery put in place, Sierra Leone's decentralisation project has been hailed in many quarters as successful, due both to its devolution pace and the government's fiscal and political commitment (Searle, 2008; Zhou, 2009; Srivastava and Larizza, 2011).

In this chapter, the analytical focus shifts from political affiliation and its influence on resource access and performance ranking to the planning, management, progress and trajectory of local service delivery across the four case study councils. Fundamentally, this chapter sits at the core of one of the thesis's main objectives – to compensate for the dearth of empirical analytical reviews of decentralisation interventions in sub-Saharan Africa – and contributes to answering the thesis's central research question regarding the extent to which decentralisation affects public service delivery in post-war Sierra Leone. The chapter questions the validity of the recent clean bill of health awarded to Sierra Leone's decentralisation programme by donor-led decentralisation researches and evaluation reports (Zouh, 2009; Fanthorpe, et al., 2011; Srivastava and Larizza, 2011; World Bank, 2014) and asks if such conclusions are hasty and naïve, and fail to appreciate complex contextual issues around the political economy of decentralisation and public service delivery in Sierra Leone. The chapter also questions the donor-led technocratic approach (Steger and Roy, 2010; Marriage, 2013) of decentralisation interventions aimed at curbing preferential treatment associated with a local council's affiliation with the party of the government in power (Hibbs, 1992; Schmidt, 1996; Ahmad et al., 2005; Fukuyama, 2004; Greenwood, 2008; Bevir, 2011). It asks whether institutionalised formulaic approaches to decentralisation promote true local democracy and participatory local empowerment, or whether it reinforces austerity-type economic strategies by transferring responsibilities to local people and,

with them, the blame for any failure (Mamdani, 1996; Cook and Kothari, 2001; Williams, 2004).

Based on primary data from the four case study councils and other secondary sources – especially the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) (Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF International, 2009, 2014) and the School Census Report (MEST, 2012) – this chapter makes two interlinked arguments about the role of decentralisation in participatory local public service delivery enhancement. First, it argues that decentralisation in Sierra Leone has not delivered on its core promise of equitable, quality public services for all (Wunsch and Oluwu, 1995; Oyugi, 2000; Oxhon et al., 2004; Government of Sierra Leone, 2005), nor has it delivered on allocative efficiency, participatory local governance or local ownership of development interventions (Faguet, 2000; Barankay and Lockwood, 2006). Although there has been a quantitative increase in service delivery infrastructures and clients for the two observed sectors (basic education and primary health), this does not translate to quality and equitable health and education services across different demographics. And, apart from the fact that the health and education ministries were among the first to devolve substantial functions to local councils relative to other central government ministries and agencies (Whiteside, 2007; Srivastava and Larizza, 2011), they both face management control and functional relevance crises that eroded public trust and confidence, together with stiff competition from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who have gained unparalleled access to donor funding in the development and public service delivery market place. Therefore, it is difficult to primarily link quantitative improvements in health and education entirely to decentralisation.

Secondly, the chapter argues that the institutional technocratic approach to decentralisation and public service delivery fails to consider fundamental local socio-economic and political dynamics that influence public policy choices. By examining the service delivery processes, variations and progress in the four local council areas, the thesis unpacks the politics of democratic decentralisation and provides a strong context-specific analytical basis for understanding the socio-political dynamics of democratic decentralisation and public service delivery in a polarised multicultural and multi-relational context. It does so in four interconnected sections. Following this introductory section, section 5.1 discusses the processes of local public service delivery; in particular, it examines how local services are planned and delivered, why, who is in control and what the local processes of participation in the planning and delivery of

local public services are. Section 5.2 tracks progress in local public service delivery in the health and education sectors in the four case study councils, identifying where, how and why progress has been made, who has benefitted, who has not, and why. The last section summarises the main arguments of the chapter and discusses some of the key conclusions drawn from the analyses.

### **5.1 The Process of Local Service Delivery**

Devolution took off in earnest in 2005 with an initial World Bank-funded visibility grant – the ‘Rapid Result Initiative’ – designed to solicit community buy-in to the decentralisation project through the implementation of quick impact interventions.<sup>112</sup> Beyond this, the Government of Sierra Leone (1997, 2002, and 2005) had earlier carved out a political stability function – based on democratic civilian rule – for decentralisation in its national good governance strategy. The strategy argues that the reactivation of local government demonstrates government’s acknowledgement that ‘the survival of a democratic government depends upon the revival of democratic participatory institutions’ – such as local councils – that guarantee greater civic participation in the governance of the state and limit the risk of political instability (Government of Sierra Leone, 1997:36-39).

This section argues that despite the government of Sierra Leone’s commitment to hand over decision-making powers to local people, local participatory agencies such as the ward development committees (WDCs), and participatory tools such as participatory rural appraisals (PRAs) (Chambers, 1994), are quintessentially austerity-light approaches designed to transfer the burden of local service delivery to the ‘community’ and, by extension, to blame it in the event of failure (Williams, 2004). The superficial participatory process created by decentralisation was mostly co-optive rather than empowering (Crook and Kothari, 2001), as the service delivery functions devolved to local councils were either previously planned and delivered centrally or part of the deconcentrated framework whose officials remain reluctant to give up power and resources to local councils – making the whole decentralisation process incomplete and top-down in its approach (Fanthorpe et al., 2011).

The local level public service delivery cycle involves three stages of planning: implementation, evaluation and feedback. The planning stage is led by a local technical

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<sup>112</sup> Interview with a former employee of the World Bank-funded RRI project, Makeni City (August, 2014).

planning committee (LTPC) – an inter-agency group made up of local councils’ administrations and the devolved sectors. Every five years, central government sets out a broad national development agenda and spending priorities. Since 2002, these development agendas have been espoused in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and each PRSP sets out certain development priorities for a particular period. At the central government level, each government ministry, department or agency (MDA) has a sectoral development plan – an adapted version of the national development plan with ‘MDA-specific priorities and needs’.<sup>113</sup> The role of the local technical planning committee is to coordinate, compile and harmonise the sectoral development plans and each council’s development priorities in line with the national development agenda.<sup>114</sup>

The LTPC uses a combination of desk-based reviews and participatory rural appraisals – defined as a set of ‘approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act’ (Chambers, 1994:953) – to capture the development needs of local constituents and to identify and order them in a scale of preference. Although this local planning process claims to be consultative and participatory, it has been criticised by local people as co-optive at its best and, at its worst, a platform to validate council and MDA decisions:

Council employees come to the local planning meetings with ready-made agendas and priorities, with little or no room for the Ward Committee member to bring in innovative ideas. Apart from the fact that we were almost always informed late for meetings, women are almost always under-represented.<sup>115</sup>

In patriarchal societies such as Sierra Leone, women’s exclusion from development planning is perpetuated by victim self-blaming and acceptance of the status quo (Kenworth and Malami, 1999; Coffe and Bolzendahl, 2011). As one ward development committee (WDC) member lamented, ‘we struggle to get active women in our ward, the others prefer not to participate, even those that manage to do so, hardly speak in the presence of their male counterparts’.<sup>116</sup> In addition to the lack of active local participation, especially for women and young people, despite the fact that their exclusion has been fully theorised as one of the causes of Sierra Leone’s civil war (Halon, 2005; Keen, 2005; Richards, 1996; Abdullah, 1998), participatory processes in

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<sup>113</sup> Interview with the District Medical Officer (DMO) of Kenema District, Kenema City (May, 2015).

<sup>114</sup> Interview with the Development Planning Officer, Bo City Council (May, 2015).

<sup>115</sup> Interview with a WDC member for Bo City Council - Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>116</sup> Interview with a WDC member in Lungi town, Port Loko District (June, 2015).

rural development can easily be instrumentalised as agents of bureaucratic tyranny (Crook and Kothari, 2001) as Williams (2004; 564-565) argues:

Participatory Rural Appraisal has led to bureaucratic power...and the discourse of participation plays a major role in the legitimation of that power. By directly incorporating swathes of intended development beneficiaries within the conduct of development projects themselves, the objects of development (constructed as 'the common people', 'the rural poor', etc.) are deemed to become empowered subjects or even authors of their own development. In this way, any blame for project 'failure' is displaced from macro-level concerns, and re-localised onto 'the people' (as bad participants/non-participants) leaving the anti-politics machine free to grind ever onwards.

Such critiques of PRA and rural development processes question the validity of participatory development, especially how it can promote allocative efficiency when participation is co-optive and discriminatory (Oluwu, 2006). Boone (2003:4) has cautioned against blind faith in the new wave of participatory governance and rural development in Africa, arguing that 'decentralisation does not necessarily empower local citizens, but can simply strengthen local powerbrokers or state agents instead'. In Sierra Leone, the local participatory planning process is seriously constrained by the neoliberal institutional arrangement of decentralisation which gives supervisory and coordination responsibilities for the administrative and fiscal oversight of local councils to donor-created semi-autonomous institutions such as the Decentralisation Secretariat (DecSec) and the Local Government Finance Department (LGFD).<sup>117</sup> The fact that the development plans of local councils have to be in line with the national development agenda – which is not always consistent with local priorities – suggests it is the national, and not the local agenda, that takes precedence. In local development planning meetings, noted a WDC member, employees of the council and MDAs always begin the public consultation meetings with a list of pre-identified priorities for the WDC members to validate: 'the identification and discussion of development always starts from them and not from us'.<sup>118</sup>

The implementation stage commences after the harmonisation of the various development plans into a three-year local development agenda approved by the elected chamber of councillors.<sup>119</sup> Before implementation, the local development plan needs to be fully budgeted, based on a national Medium Term Economic Framework (MTEF) –

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<sup>117</sup> See Figure 3 for the structure of local government in Sierra Leone and Chapter Eight for an analysis of the limits of donor-created institutions with legal basis in the decentralization process.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with a WDC member in Lungi town, Port Loko District (June, 2015).

<sup>119</sup> Interview with the Development Planning Officer of Bo City Council, Bo City (May, 2015).

a financial and economic development tool that guides government's development financing and public sector expenditures.<sup>120</sup> The final three-year plan is broken down into specific activities to be implemented on the basis of cash flow from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) and development partners. One of the challenges of this service delivery approach is the lack of local level financial autonomy. Annual budget circulars distributed by MoFED to councils set a spending ceiling; it follows that councils have to prioritise their service delivery programmes and activities, selecting from among their wish list of development plans which will be implemented based on the available funding. The corollary of such a devolved funding is that those activities not at the top of the list or outside the funding priorities of the central government lose out.

Funds for local service delivery and council administration are transferred to a consolidated local council account for onward distribution to dedicated devolved sector accounts. The council mayor or chairman, together with the local council chief administrator (CA) and the respective sector heads (e.g., the deputy director of education and district medical officer) are the main signatories to the sector accounts.<sup>121</sup> Withdrawal of funds from these accounts for activity implementation is supposed to follow strict administrative procedures, including the development of an activity proposal (clearly setting out service delivery activities, objectives, beneficiaries and costs) and the completion of a public expenditure tracking (PET) form, both of which require the approval of the local council chief administrator. This localised system of accessing funds for activity implementation has been hailed as an easy and fast-track process of service delivery relative to the pre-devolution centralised bureaucratic system where 'field-based staff of deconcentrated central government MDAs must go to Freetown for approval, even for the purchase of stationeries'.<sup>122</sup>

According to Fanthorpe et al. (2011:23), employees of devolved sectors are 'generally enthusiastic about decentralization...because it channels unprecedented volumes of resources to their sectors and gives them greater autonomy in administrative decision-making'. On the flipside, however, are central transfer delays and the late liquidation of council expenses.<sup>123</sup> This leads to erratic and unpredictable intergovernmental fiscal transfers with funds 'reaching council accounts, on some occasions, six months behind

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<sup>120</sup> Interview with a senior economist attached to the LGFD, MoFED Freetown (July, 2015).

<sup>121</sup> Interview with the Finance Officer of Port Loko District Council (July 2015).

<sup>122</sup> Interview with DMO of Bo District, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>123</sup> Interview with a senior economist at the LGFD, Freetown (August, 2015).

schedule.<sup>124</sup> The late transfer of resources means that councils cannot systematically implement their outlined development priorities, making councils' implementation of devolved sector activities mostly dependent on donor funding. The problem with direct donor funding to MDAs for devolved functions is the lack of council oversight and financial scrutiny, as seen in the education sector in Port Loko District Council in 2011. In this case, one international NGO funded almost all the education activities in the district to the extent that the district education office implemented all its planned activities for the year using less than 10% of its central transfers; the office deliberately minimised the amount of council funds used to avoid financial control measures, and instead reported directly to their donors without reference to the council.

The growing influence of NGOs in the development marketplace and local public service delivery can be explained, in part, by the lack of donor confidence (due to concerns over the prudent and efficient management of resources) in local council authorities to directly implement donor-funded local service delivery projects.<sup>125</sup> In 2011, for instance, the Government of Sierra Leone funded the renovation of the Bo Club House – a public entertainment facility – through a public-private partnership. Even before the official signing of the contract, the council chairman had ordered a 50% advance payment to the contractor which was against both the finance ministry's procurement procedures and the professional advice of the finance officer. Recounting his experience, the finance officer recalled:

Because I knew the payment was improper, I asked the council chairman to write an official letter instructing me to pay...a few weeks later, my relationship with him deteriorated and I was transferred without due notice.<sup>126</sup>

Although the procurement was probed later by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), the contract itself was not terminated, nor was the council chairman prosecuted. The decision not to press charges was partly due to the personal relationship between the council chairman and the then local government minister; despite their political differences (the then local government minister is a member of the APC party whilst the council chairman is a member of the SLPP), they 'were close enough to engage in financial impropriety as the 'chairman was sending contract kickbacks to the

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<sup>124</sup> Interview with the Finance Officer of Port Loko District Council, Port Loko (July 2015).

<sup>125</sup> Interview with a DfID Freetown-based international staff member, Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>126</sup> Interview with a local government finance officer, Bo City (May, 2015).

minister'.<sup>127</sup> Financial impropriety – in Sierra Leone's public sector management – is not necessarily an exclusive feature of decentralisation; what decentralisation has done is to facilitate the devolution of corruption (Kandeh, 2012, D'Arcy and Cornell, 2016) such that the corrupt bidding is now done at the local level, by local officials in the interests of their national political godfathers.

The third stage in the local service delivery triangle is measurement and evaluation. The control mechanisms in the disbursement and management of resources were designed to curb financial malpractice in councils' financial management and service delivery process.<sup>128</sup> For a financial request to be honoured, the requesting devolved sector or MDA is supposed to have properly liquidated its previous funding. Where the request includes procurement, the council procurement officer does the procurement and delivers to the ministry concerned.<sup>129</sup> Ideally, every funded activity must be followed by an internal evaluation to verify that activities were implemented as planned. In reality, this is only a utopian idealisation. As one council staff member said:

You can only monitor and evaluate the activities the CA [chief administrator] wants you to, otherwise you will be marginalised and your evaluation report will gather dust in one remote corner of the CA's office. Those ministries that are in the good books of the chairman and/or the CA hardly follow due processes .... they will receive funds repeatedly without liquidating for [sic] the previous ones, and in extreme circumstances, we have written reports for devolved sectors to satisfy external evaluators.<sup>130</sup>

The essence of the internal evaluation process is not only to curb waste and ensure due process; it is also a guarantee that citizens have the full space to participate in the service delivery process and to ensure that lessons learned in the implementation process feed into the new cycle of development planning and activity implementation. Whilst some positive progress has been made, evidenced by the ease of access to resources for public service delivery at the local level, local level oversight of service delivery - cloaked in the so-called rural participation and empowerment participation façade - is yet to transfer true decision making authority into the hands of rural people.<sup>131</sup> Part of the problem is that Sierra Leone's decentralisation architecture prioritised the setting up of technical and, supposedly, apolitical institutions, separate from the context and motivation of its

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with a senior civil society activist involved in the Bo Club House corruption investigation, Bo City (October, 2014).

<sup>128</sup> Interview with a senior economist at the LGFD, Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>129</sup> Interview with the Finance Officer of Makeni City Council, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>130</sup> Interview with a local council monitoring and evaluation officer, Port Town (June, 2015).

<sup>131</sup> Interview with the Southern Region Ombudsman, Bo City (May, 2015).

employees – as if institutional compliance is an algorithm that is independent of human control and influence.

## **5.2 Service Delivery Trajectory, Progress and Limitations**

Sierra Leone's second Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) – the Agenda for Change – underscores the government's commitment to providing equitable and quality services to all its citizens (Government of Sierra Leone, 2008). Sierra Leone has continued to dedicate a sizeable proportion of her national budget to the provision of public services at the local level since the commencement to decentralisation in 2004. But regardless of this increased budgetary allocation for public services, the country continues to register appalling data in some of its key human development indicators.<sup>132</sup> Therefore, both the Local Government Act and the country's PRSPs foresee a future where local councils are increasingly responsible and accountable for the provision of local public services (World Bank, 2014). The next section analyses the trajectory of public service delivery in the education and health sectors to explain what, how, where and why progress has occurred within these sectors since the commencement of devolution. It does so with an acknowledgement of the limitation of lack of comparable data across sectors and different demographics.

It argues that whilst quantitative progress in health and education services has been made since the commencement of devolution in 2004 – in terms of the increase in the number of health and education service delivery infrastructures, school enrolment figures (despite the huge deficits that remain) since the commencement of devolution in 2004 and people accessing government health facilities – the story is not the same in terms of quality, accessibility and equitable distribution across different demographics. This is partly due to the political nature of decentralisation which centralises significant resource mobilisation and distribution, powers in Freetown making councils' autonomous resource mobilisation disproportionate to their service delivery responsibilities.

### *5.2.1 Education: Progress and Challenges*

The education ministry has near full control of the education sector in Sierra Leone – dictating policy formulation, funding arrangements, curriculum development and teacher recruitment (Education Act, 2004). Although the LGA (2004) provides for the

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<sup>132</sup> Sierra Leone was ranked 181 (moving up two from the previous year) out of 188 countries in the UN Human Development Report 2015 with an average annual increase of about 1.28%.

devolution of basic education, the Education Act of 2004 gave ultimate authority to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST); this includes setting up school management boards and the supervision of school administration – functions that were also devolved to councils. Despite the fact that the two Acts were enacted in the same year, no attempt was made to synergise them. This section argues that, in addition to the education ministry’s tight control over education resources and policy, the lack of legal clarity on who has the power to decide on educational issues means that the education ministry is gradually recentralising functions initially devolved to local councils, facilitating the transformation of local councils into agents of central government instead of semi-autonomous political entities.

The Agenda for Prosperity (Sierra Leone’s third poverty reduction strategy paper) prioritised education, calling for the improvement of quality and access at all levels and increased investment for the refinement of the school curriculum to emphasises skills acquisition, teacher training, research and supervision, and public-private partnerships that promote high quality education relevant to the needs of the job market (World Bank, 2013). In its Education Sector Strategic Plan (2007-2015), the education ministry (2007: vii) prioritised primary education and skills training alongside ‘appropriate tertiary education’ as prerequisites for meeting ‘present and future development needs’. Since the end of the war and the introduction of a free primary education policy in 2005, school enrolment in all categories (pre-primary, primary, junior and senior schools) has increased by an average of 5.5% – from a total of 1,501,461 in 2004/05 to 1,585,592 in 2010/11.

**Table 5: School Enrolment Trends 2004/04 - 2010/11**

Education Level	Year		Trend	
	2004/05	2010/11	Difference	%
Pre-Primary	20,632	37,351	16,719	1
Primary	1,280,532	1,194,505	-86,348	-6
Junior School	155,052	244,489	89,437	6
Senior School	44,924	108,247	63,323	4
Total	1,501,461	1,584,592	83,131	5.5

Source: Williams (2014) and MEST (2012).

Nationally, education infrastructures have also increased from 4,298 primary and 280 secondary schools in 2004/05 to 5,931 primary and 1,096 secondary schools in

2010/11, indicating a 38% (primary) and 291% (secondary) increase over a 5-6 year period (MEST, 2012). At the primary school level, 48% of all school-going pupils in the 2010/11 school census report were girls, and about 33% of the school-going pupils in the 2010/11 census were from the northern province (MEST, 2012) – a province with previously low levels of school enrolment and completion rates, relative to the other three.<sup>133</sup>

However, quantitative increase in enrolment and schooling facilities is not a universal feature across the country. Among the four case-study councils (see Table 6), Bo City Council has the highest overall enrolment figures of the three city councils; Kenema City has the highest enrolment in both pre-primary and primary schools, whilst Bo City has the highest in both junior and senior secondary schools. Although Port Loko District has the highest total enrolment (including at primary school level) of the four, its enrolment figures in junior and senior secondary school are abysmal – suggesting a high dropout rate in the transition from primary to junior and from junior to senior schools.

**Table 6: School Enrolment Trends (2010/11) in the Case Study Areas**

Council	Pre-primary	Primary	Junior Secondary	Senior Secondary	Total
<b>Kenema City</b>	2,422	49,456	13,690	7,938	73,506
<b>Makeni City</b>	971	19,934	10,686	7,863	39,454
<b>Port Loko District</b>	1,737	106,736	14,193	3,830	126,496
<b>Bo City</b>	2,034	43,681	18,906	13,007	77,628
<b>Total</b>					<b>317,084</b>

Source: MEST (2012)

As Table 6 shows, only about 3% of Port Loko's 126,496 registered students in 2010/11 were in senior secondary school whereas in Bo City Council, 16% of its total number of registered students were in senior secondary during the same period. Such disparities in the composition of enrolment figures among the four case study councils unmask several hidden realities about school completion rates in certain localities and the implications for literacy rates and future employment prospects.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with the Director of Planning and Policy Development, MEST, Freetown (September, 2014).

Nationally, there is at least one category (pre-primary, primary, junior and senior secondary) of school in each of 149 chiefdoms across Sierra Leone.<sup>134</sup> However, approximately 84 of the country's 149 chiefdoms without a pre-primary school, 15 chiefdoms without a junior secondary school and 100 chiefdoms without a senior secondary school (MEST, 2012). It follows that pupils in the 100 chiefdoms without a senior secondary school must move outside their chiefdoms of residence to access senior secondary school education – a requirement which can easily lead to them dropping-out of school. Also, about 34% of all functioning public schools are still waiting approval from the education ministry, and receive no funding from government. In Barlie Village in the Tikonko chiefdom, ten miles outside Bo City, a primary school with 400 pupils had only a few desks and benches and no toilet, electricity or safe drinking water. Of the school's six teachers recruited by the school's management board (for the approval of the education ministry), only one had been approved by the Ministry of Education; the rest were not yet on the official government payroll since they are yet to be approved and issued with official employment pin codes. 'We cannot continue to work for nothing...we will leave the school at the end of this academic year, let us see how one teacher can teach 400 pupils', noted one of the unpaid teachers.<sup>135</sup>

In addition, about 39% of children aged 6-11 are not in school, and 60% of those aged 12-18 have either dropped out or were never enrolled in the first place (MEST, 2012). The school census data also reveals that over 50% of classrooms across the country require major repairs; a sizeable proportion of pupils are taught in unsatisfactory classroom environments with limited access to water and sanitation facilities. In some of the schools visited as part of this study, classrooms were overcrowded, with pupils cramped in broken chairs and others sitting on the floor. And although the government's teacher: pupil ratio target is thirty pupils per teacher (MEST, 2007), the current national estimate is 50 pupils per teacher (Williams, 2014). In Kenema City, for instance, the teacher: pupil ratio is 28:1, (in line with the government threshold), it is 38:1 in the city of Makeni and about 68:1 in Freetown and Port Loko (Williams, 2014:32).

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<sup>134</sup> The lowest unit of governance under the local government system in Sierra Leone managed by chiefdom councils headed by a paramount chief – see Figure 3.

<sup>135</sup> Interview with an un-approved primary school teacher, Barlie Village, Bo District (May, 2015).

The state of the teaching and learning environment, as one head teacher explained, 'has a direct consequence on the output of our pupils'.<sup>136</sup> Since 2006, the performance of pupils in public exams has been on a steady decline. While performance is relatively better at the National Primary School Examination (NPSE) level, with a pass rate of over 70%, at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) level (required to progress from junior to senior secondary level), 'one in four candidates that took the exams' failed to meet the minimum senior school entry requirements' (William, 2014:33). Unfortunately, most of the pupils who failed to meet the minimum senior school enrolment requirements were later admitted into senior schools, creating a cycle of poor performance from junior to senior secondary school, and eventually upwards at tertiary level. In recognition of this poor performance, in 2009 the Government of Sierra Leone set up the Gbamanja Commission of Inquiry to look into the causes of poor student performance in public exams and to proffer recommendations (Awoko Newspaper, 30 June, 2009). The commission's report identified challenges including an outdated curriculum, poor infrastructure, and lack of discipline, shortage of teachers, a poor teaching and learning environment, and a culture of corruption in school administration (Politico Newspaper, 20 June, 2013).

In addition to the challenges of performance, the decentralisation of basic education is yet to close the urban-rural gap in both access to and quality of education. There is a huge disparity in school attendance rates between urban and rural areas, and higher versus lower income categories among children of primary school age – 'by between 20 and 30% in urban and rural areas, and 40% for children in the highest family wealth quintile, relative to those in the lowest quintile' (Williams 2014:3). In addition to the challenges of ensuring that every child of school-age attends school, there is also the serious challenge of ensuring that those already enrolled complete their schooling. According to the 2010/11 school census report (MEST, 2012) for instance, close to 40% of children between the ages of 6 to 11 are not in school, whilst 60% of those between ages 12 - to 18 have dropped out of school.

One of the key promises of decentralisation is the improvement of local services through efficient resource allocation (Tiebout, 1956) based on a good understanding of local development problems and priorities, and anchored on a proximity and information advantage (Smoke, 2003; Lockwood, 2005; Conyers, 2007; Robinson,

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<sup>136</sup> Interview with the head teacher of a local government primary school in Bo City (May, 2014).

2007). However, the evidence above suggests that decentralisation in Sierra Leone is yet to deliver an improvement in quality of and access to basic education, especially for the rural poor. Part of the problem is rooted in the fact that decentralisation institutions oversimplify deep-rooted traditional beliefs with technical solutions. In household and sexual distribution of labour analysis in the developing world (Punch, 2001), the role of women and children in household labour and their access to education and paid employment has resurfaced, especially how gendered household responsibilities affect girls' and women's access to service and opportunities (Brines, 1994; Beneria, 1979; Greenstein, 2000; Sullivan, 2000). Formal education, in many parts of Africa, traditionally favours boys over girls (Assié-Lumumba, 2006). In rural Sierra Leone, boys are sent and allowed to stay in school, while girls are either at home helping their mothers with domestic chores or working on the farm. Where girls are sent to school, basic education is considered more than enough, and decentralisation lacks systematic and holistic integration with local institutions of culture and tradition such as chieftaincy and secret societies. Decentralisation has not been able to influence long-held traditional beliefs that have enormous implications for the health and education of young girls and women. In the village of Kagbathama in the Port Loko district, a chief and the local councillor were handling a case in which a school teacher impregnated a 14-year-old junior school girl. While the local social worker wanted the case moved to the police in Port Loko Town, the father, supported by the local chief, preferred his daughter to be married off to the local teacher, blamed her for seducing the teacher and stated that 'she will be married off anyway, as there is no money to continue paying her school fees'.<sup>137</sup> Unfortunately, traditional justice and conflict prevention mechanisms in rural Sierra Leone were not integrated into a holistic programme of local governance reform.

At the local public service delivery level, councils should be providing teaching and learning materials (TLMs) plus school fee subsidies to all government-assisted schools at the local level. But, following the argument of economies of scale (Silberston, 1972) and the need to cut down on waste, the education ministry has recentralised the procurement of TLMs, the payment of school fee subsidies and examinations fees.<sup>138</sup> Despite the government's centralisation move, there are sustainability mechanisms in the procurement and use of teaching aids as 'most schools don't have functioning libraries – the same text books are bought every year without an account of the old

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<sup>137</sup> Comments from the father of a pregnant 14 year old junior school pupil, during field observation Kagbathama Village, Port Loko District (July, 2015).

<sup>138</sup> Interview with the Director of Inspectorate, MEST Freetown (August, 2014).

ones; justifying in part, why text books with Government of Sierra Leone logo and the warning ‘not for sale’, are all over the streets of major towns and cities of Sierra Leone for sale.<sup>139</sup> However, in almost all the schools in the four case study councils, parents said it would have been better for them to pay school fees as school authorities impose additional costs, ranging from ‘development fee to Community Teacher Association fee’ and other unexplained charges.<sup>140</sup> While this is not a policy sanctioned by the education ministry, authorities acknowledged that schools are charging unauthorised fees to parents – an act which can lead to exclusion and/or dropping-out by pupils whose parents cannot pay:

We have received complaints regarding unofficial financial demands on pupils by teachers. Unfortunately, I cannot police all the schools in my jurisdiction...but these acts are not approved by the ministry, and those found guilty are heavily dealt with. Two months ago, we received a complaint of this nature from Foindu village in the lower Maforki chiefdom. We investigated thoroughly...the accused teacher was found guilty and has since been suspended without pay.<sup>141</sup>

Although primary school education (other levels of education pay a minimal fee) is free in principle, in practice, other unexplained charges from school authorities place tremendous pressure on poor parents. The average annual school fee per pupil at secondary school level is about \$20 - an unaffordable amount for low-income families living on less than \$1 a day with an average of three to four children of school-going age. In addition, most schools in rural Sierra Leone lack housing and other incentives to lure trained and qualified teachers from the big towns and cities, therefore, ‘rural teachers are tempted to pass the burden to parents’ through ‘unofficial charges, selling food and non-food items in schools and pupils assisting teachers in their farm work’.<sup>142</sup> And in a decentralised system in which the devolved employees of MDAs are not fully accountable to the locally-elected authorities, local councils lack the power to investigate and punish them.<sup>143</sup>

As part of government’s affirmative action to promote girls’ education (especially in the Northern Province), in 2005 school fees were waived for girls from the beginning to the end of the basic education level. However, there is a huge information asymmetry between parents and school authorities on government policy regarding additional

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<sup>139</sup> Comments from a FGD in Kenema City (May, 2015).

<sup>140</sup> Comments from a FGD with parents, Port Loko Town (July, 2015).

<sup>141</sup> Interview with the DDE of Port Loko District, Port Loko Town (July, 2015).

<sup>142</sup> Comments from a FGD with CSO members in Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>143</sup> See section 8. 2 on the challenges of local councils’ human resources management.

educational support for girls in the northern province designed to make up for the gender imbalance in school enrolment in the northern province. Most parents were unaware that school is free for girls at the basic education level in the northern province 'I have always been paying for my two girls', noted an angry parent in a focus group discussion in Port Loko in the north of Sierra Leone; 'both of them in junior school, nobody told me it is free'.<sup>144</sup> Another challenge the education sector faces at the local level is resource management. The education ministry's decision to centralise the procurement of teaching aids – a devolved function under the LGA – cannot be unconnected to the ease of resource looting associated with public procurement in the developing world (Appoloni and Nshombo, 2013). In 2007, for instance, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) charged seven education sector officials on several counts of misappropriation of public funds and diversion of public property for private use (Conteh, 2014).

### *5.2.2 Health: Progress and Challenges*

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) prides itself on being one of the ministries to transfer all functions earmarked for devolution to local councils on time.<sup>145</sup> By the end of 2008, the health ministry had transferred responsibility for six out of the eight functions – including births and deaths registration; public health information; environmental health; maintenance and management of non-technical equipment; facilities management; and primary healthcare – slated for devolution to local councils under the Statutory Instrument of the LGA. Whilst the MoHS passed over some crucial responsibilities of the country's health delivery system to local councils, it could not resist the temptation to keep those functions that had huge financial resource allocation such as the procurement of equipment and drugs and the management of non-technical secondary health care. This section builds on the previous one, and argues that the devolution of primary health care delivery produced tension between central bureaucrats and local political actors over power and resource control at the local level, leading to a haphazard and incomplete devolution.

The lack of legal clarity over authority and resource management and the myriad of actors and health service providers at the local level, the section further argues, makes it difficult, if not impossible, to establish either a causal or a correlational link between decentralisation and the quantitative improvements in health care delivery

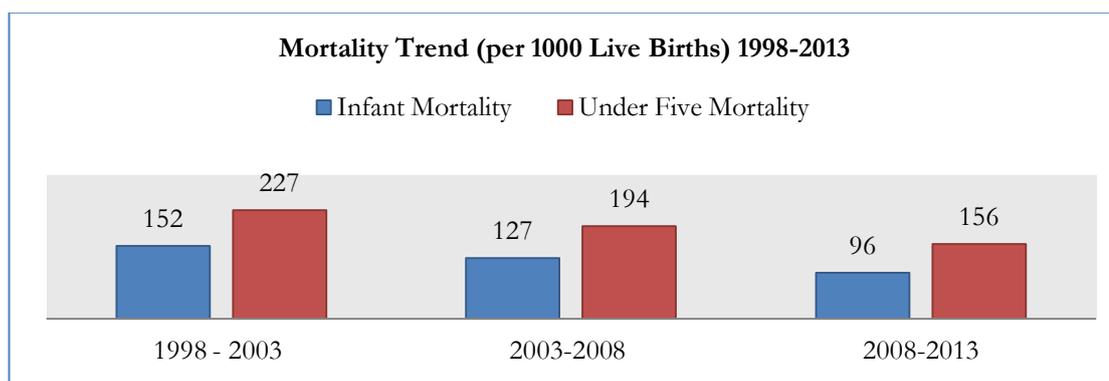
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<sup>144</sup> Comments by a parent in a FGD in Port Loko Town (July, 2015).

<sup>145</sup> Interview with the Chief Medical Officer, MoHS Freetown (August, 2014).

infrastructures and service users. Local councils are overburdened with neoliberal systems compliance and lack the time, resources and specialist expertise needed to bridge the rural-urban gap in public service delivery and to supervise technical services. The section further suggests that the ease of access to resources at the local level – associated with decentralisation – and the enthusiasm it generates among devolved sector employees (Fanthorpe et al., 2011) facilitates a culture of misappropriation and mismanagement of public resources in a scheme conceived centrally, but hatched locally.

Sierra Leone has some of the most appalling maternal and child mortality rates in sub-Saharan Africa (Bhutta et al., 2010). In the five year period prior to the first Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) in 2008, infant and child mortality rates were 92 and 156 deaths per 1,000 births respectively – meaning one in eleven children died before age one, and one in seven did not survive to see their fifth birthday (Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF International, 2014). Despite this grim reading, the situation had improved tremendously (see Figure 15) from 152 infant and 227 under five mortality between 1998 and 2003, and continued to do so, reducing to 96 infant and 156 under five mortality per 1, 000 live births from 2008 to 2013 – slightly below the health ministry’s child mortality target of 90 deaths per 1,000 live births by 2015 (MoHS, 2012).



**Figure 15: Infant and child mortality trends (1998-2013)**  
 Source: Author’s calculation based on 2008 and 2013 DHS figures.

Notwithstanding this improvement, there are huge mortality differentials between regions and districts, rural and urban settlements, and literate versus illiterate families across the country. The district of Bonthe in the southern region, for instance, has the lowest childhood mortality rates – 77 deaths per 1,000 live births – while Kenema district has the highest – 224 deaths per 1,000 live births (Statistics Sierra Leone and

ICF International, 2014). In addition to regional variations, decentralisation has not been able to overcome the poor versus rich, and the rural versus urban divide in public service access. The rural-urban childhood mortality rate is 181 (rural) and 151 (urban) per 1,000 live births, while the under-five mortality rate is 180 for children born to mothers without formal education, and 140 deaths per 1,000 births for mothers with secondary and or higher education (Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF International, 2014). The figures suggest that children born in rural communities to mothers with no formal education are more likely to die before their fifth birthday than those born to educated mothers in urban settlements. Considering the fact that over 60% of Sierra Leonean women are illiterate and live in rural settings (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2016), it follows that, despite the improvement in child mortality, the uneducated rural poor has not benefitted equitably.

**Table 7: Key Maternal and Child Health Indicators in the Case Study Areas**

Indicator	National %	Individual Local Council Area %			
		Bo	Kenema	Makeni	Port Loko
Pregnant women who received antenatal care from a skilled provider (doctors, nurses and other professional medical personnel)	97	100	98	96	97
Births assisted by a skilled provider	60	76	83	45	46
Births delivered in a health facility	54	72	77	41	39
Children 12-23 months fully vaccinated	68	82	75	69	64

Source: SLL and ICF International (2014).

Of the four case study councils, Bo and Kenema City Councils have better child and maternal indicators than Makeni City and Port Loko District Council. As Table 7 illustrates, clinic-based and nurse-assisted births have increased, with 72% and 77% clinic-assisted births in Bo and Kenema respectively, both significantly above the national average of 54%; and 41 and 39%, both below the national average, in Port Loko and Makeni respectively (Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF International, 2014). In addition, vaccination coverage increased from 54% in 2008 to 81% by the end of 2011, with Bo recording the highest coverage at 82%, followed by Kenema (75%), Makeni (69%) and Port Loko (65%) (MoHS, 2012).

**Table 8: Health Facility Density in the Case Study Areas**

Local Council	Population	Number of Health Facilities	Facility Density (per 10,000)
Bo	596,469	134	2.2
Bombali	445,620	106	2.4
Kenema	592,466	130	2.2
Port Loko	503,500	117	2.3

Source: MoHS, (2012)

According to the 2011 Service Availability and Readiness Assessment (SARA) report published by the MoHS, public health facilities improved by a little over 20% from an estimated 1,000 health facilities in 2004, to a total of 1,264 by 2011 with a facility density of 2.2 per 10,000 people (MoHS, 2012). A critical question in relation to this quantitative growth in health facilities is the extent to which the improvement is linked to decentralisation, or how decentralisation has reshaped resources, politics and the administrative ethos of primary health care in Sierra Leone. For the top bureaucrats of the health ministry, the relationship is simple and straightforward: ‘increased spending in public service delivery at the local level and the devolution of the health system management’ improved access to resources and autonomous decision-making processes, and the reduction of centralised red tape at the Peripheral Health Unit (PHU)<sup>146</sup> level had a knock-on positive effect on efficiency, timeliness and improvement in health service delivery at the local level.<sup>147</sup>

However, such associational links, while appearing to be reasonable, may in fact be hasty and naïve, and should be treated with caution considering the fact the health service delivery system was largely deconcentrated prior to devolution. At the time of writing (February, 2017), there has yet to be a major causality study on decentralisation and service delivery conducted in Sierra Leone to ascertain if the current rate of donor and government spending, implemented in a centralised or deconcentrated political topography, will produce similar or better outcomes. Besides, health facility density analysis obscures the true picture of access to medical facilities as it says nothing about the size of the facility, its personnel, their expertise, equipment and drugs availability. As a medical doctor noted:

<sup>146</sup> The general name for the smallest and first point of contact in the public service delivery system in Sierra Leone (MoHS, 2004).

<sup>147</sup> Interview with the Chief Medical Officer, MoHS, Freetown (August, 2014).

The entire Kenema district has no specialist doctor. There is only one medical doctor – who is a general physician – and the hospital superintendent – who is a surgeon. Yes, a number of hospitals have been renovated and new clinics built, with some essential drugs and equipment bought, but who will use them if there are no specialist doctors? Some two, three decades ago, every district in Sierra Leone had specialist doctors. Today, apart from Freetown, we only have a few generalists...Is that progress?<sup>148</sup>

At the service accessibility level, over 70% of the women interviewed in the 2013 Demographic and Health Survey reported facing challenges in accessing health care facilities; 60% raised concerns about financial exploitation by frontline health workers<sup>149</sup> and 40% had to walk over five miles to access the nearest health facility (Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF International, 2009, 2014). These challenges, like others of the health sector – such as the district medical officer’s critical analysis above – are rooted in a health care delivery system with huge information asymmetry between service users and frontline health workers in rural communities. Nurses in rural communities, lamented a civil society activist, ‘have no respect for patients; they unilaterally decide who gets mosquito bed nets and medicines’, and in many instances ‘demand money for registration and examination’.<sup>150</sup> In a focus group discussion in Kenema, participants (mostly breastfeeding mothers) noted that they were not served on a first-come, first-served basis in their local clinics. The nurse lives in the hospital compound, so ‘she opens the clinic at her own time, she will be cooking, washing and making-up whilst we are waiting...’ and ‘when she eventually comes out, she will see patients based on our social standing’, starting with the ‘wives and relatives of the chief and the councilor’, regardless of the order in which we came to the clinic.<sup>151</sup>

This system of differential service delivery based on social stratification resonates with critical literature on the political economy of hierarchy in traditional societies, the production of roles and role differentiation, and the relationship between local status and access to services (Banton, 1996; Beneria, 1997; Berman, 1998; Joyce and Gilliespie, 2000). Such selective local service delivery pattern means that in most instances those at the bottom of the social league table – mostly the poor and powerless – have to resort to private peddlers selling sub-standard drugs for their

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<sup>148</sup> Interview with the DMO of Kenema District, Kenema City (May, 2015).

<sup>149</sup> Doctors, nurses, clinicians, midwives and maternal and child care aides.

<sup>150</sup> Interview with a civil society activist, Port Loko Town (July, 2015).

<sup>151</sup> Comments from breastfeeding mothers in a FGD in Kenema City (May, 2015).

medical care. And, although some of these complaints do reach council authorities, councils cannot act because they have no direct control over devolved sector staff. A civil society activist narrated his experience of a case of abuse of office and corruption in Port Loko involving the wife of the district medical officer (DMO):

The DMO's wife is an indigene of Port Loko Town, known for organizing lavish parties and social gatherings. She uses hospital vehicles for personal social events (such as weddings). Civil society protested repeatedly, and when the matter eventually reached Freetown, the DMO was transferred...the wife threatened to sue my organization for defaming her husband...and I also received personal threats to my life. Here, being too critical of the DMO's wife is by extension being critical of the local network of family and social interests that benefits from her largesse.<sup>152</sup>

The Port Loko scenario is archetypal of the complex nature of rural socio-political dynamics which Mamdani (1996) wrote about in *Citizen and Subject*, the uneven distribution of power and the socio-political tensions it produces in the everyday life of rural African communities through decentralised despotism. In an earlier incident before the transfer of the DMO from Port Loko, which some civil society activists believed was orchestrated by the council chairman and other top APC stalwarts in the township,<sup>153</sup> the council had also refused to release funds to the District Health Management Team (DHMT) because of an allegation that the DMO had refused a 30% kickback to council and APC politicians in the district (Conteh, 2014). However, corruption and mismanagement at the local level are not essentially a product of decentralisation, but rather the ease of local resource access, the additional resources available at the local level due to devolution and the fiscal authority granted to local councils, all of which facilitate a local syndicate in which local councils release resources to devolved sectors without due diligence in exchange for kickbacks, thus facilitating the devolution of corruption from central to local government (Kandeh, 2012; D'Arcy and Cornell, 2016).<sup>154</sup>

However, it is important to note that in rural Sierra Leone the relationship between public service delivery employees and service users goes beyond one of exploitation and misinformation. In hard-to-reach villages in the mountainous district of Koinadugu, for instance, the local nurse for instance, can be the only link between the local people and the district headquarters town, and a channel of communication and access to

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<sup>152</sup> Interview with a civil society activist, Port Loko Town (July, 2015).

<sup>153</sup> Interview with a civil society activist, Port Loko Town (July, 2015).

<sup>154</sup> Interview with a civil society activist, Port Loko Town (July, 2015).

information, goods and services. As one local civil society activist noted, ‘the palm oil and other goods nurses receive from locals are not necessarily a bribe...in many instances, people don’t have the physical cash to pay for essential drugs’.<sup>155</sup> Therefore, a barter system exists in which the nurse collects goods in lieu of money, sells the goods when she travels to the district headquarters – where the District Health Management Team is based – and uses the proceeds to pay for the drugs she had given out previously. Sometimes she uses the remaining money to buy essential goods – such as salt, onions, sugar, etc. – for the villagers who had given her goods. Understanding the complex network of relationships in rural communities, where few public servants are willing to be deployed, is crucial to understanding the political economy decentralisation and public service delivery in rural Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone’s health sector is also beset by a lack of coordination between service delivery and management agencies on two fronts. On the first, capacity development for health personnel is limited and uncoordinated. Funding programmes for health care professionals are few and far between, and ‘where they are available, those with the best connections are chosen over those with the most need’.<sup>156</sup> On a second front, the chaotic environment where human resource policies to allow the annual assessment, identification and prioritised training needs for staff are not implemented properly has led to an NGO take-over of the MoHS’ staff capacity development with a myriad of workshops and seminars – most of them completely irrelevant to the human capacity and career development needs of health personnel. As one health official noted:

The health system is littered with short-term NGO interventions that are not coordinated with the DHMT. They come with letters from Freetown to implement activities and organise training workshops that are barely aligned with our staff needs...luring our nurses to abandon their duty stations because of the post training allowances they provide.<sup>157</sup>

The problems of corruption and mismanagement of donor funds by both central and local government operatives mean that donors now channel development aid for local public service delivery through NGOs, leading to a governance and public service delivery landscape dominated by non-state actors (Manji and O’Coill, 2002; Macrae et

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<sup>155</sup> Interview with a civil society activist in Makeni City (September, 2014).

<sup>156</sup> Interview with a student nurse at Njala University, whilst working as a full time nurse, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>157</sup> Interview with a serving DMO, Freetown (May, 2015).

al., 2002; Harvey, 2004; Kamat, 2004; Barnett and Weiss, 2008). The proliferation of NGOs in public service delivery via a neoliberal global development funding trajectory is akin to what Fukuyama (2004) referred to as capacity destruction, in which NGOs and international development agencies, rather than build capacity from within existing government service delivery institutions, instead recruit ‘the most experienced local staff and pay them big money to work in their schools, clinics and or project implementation units through donor-led project implementation units (PIUs)’.<sup>158</sup> This funding trend and public service delivery through the creation of donor-led project implementation units (PIUs) suggest that it is NGOs, and not the state, that provide public services, and once the NGOs’ interventionist projects wrap up, service delivery comes to an abrupt end or is transferred to government agencies whose capacity the NGOs had essentially destroyed (Manji and O’Coill, 2002; Fukuyama, 2004).

This NGO dominance in the development market place, has led to the emergence of a kind of vocabulary previously considered the exclusive preserve of the Silicon Valley capitalist enclave, in which NGOs now speak of ‘*beneficiaries*, have offices that cultivate *clients*, and make use of their *brand*, aspire to increase *efficiency* and adopt modern accountability and governance mechanisms’ (Barnett and Weiss, 2008:18). Unfortunately, the NGOs themselves are not immune from mismanagement. In village after village during this research project, people complained about the *PIU-isation* and *NGO-isation* of local service delivery, and the misappropriation of development funding by NGO handpicked village development committees (VDCs) as local implementing partners:

We have over five VDCs in this village alone. Every NGO has its own committee to work with...mostly associates of NGO employees. At the end of the day, VDC members earn a living by implementing few activities, whilst NGOs’ employees take the bulk of the money back to Freetown.<sup>159</sup>

The plethora of capacity, resource and functional management inadequacies in health service delivery have not necessarily emerged as a result of decentralisation and information asymmetry between service users and frontline health workers. However, the transfer of functions and resources without a commensurate capacity assessment

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<sup>158</sup> Interview with a civil society activist in the health sector, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>159</sup> Interview with a local community development activist, Dibia Chiefdom, Port Loko District (July, 2015).

of local councils to receive and deliver on their new responsibilities led to a functionality gap at the local level. And, as one senior local government official concurs, there was such a rush to transfer money and responsibilities that this took place without an assessment of the capacity and readiness of the new local government bodies to deliver on these new responsibilities.<sup>160</sup>

Since 2004, the health service delivery system has experienced a raft of reform programmes designed to strengthen health service delivery at local level. Among them was the ‘cash-to-facility’<sup>161</sup> programme funded by the World Bank, which seeks to transfer resources at the Peripheral Health Unit (PH) level for local health services. In each PHU, the sum of one million Leones (about \$222) was paid quarterly to cover the procurement of disinfectants, minor repairs and quarterly stipends for traditional birth attendants (TBAs) who had been drafted into the health system to discourage home deliveries.<sup>162</sup> The initiative was plunged into difficulties at its inception: payments were unpredictably late, inconsistent and full of unexplained deductions from the district health management leaders. At the PHU level, TBA allowances were not standardised; each PHU paid different rates and there was no proper bookkeeping practice.

By the end of 2010 – largely due to the failure of the cash-to-facility programme – a market-oriented system of service delivery, the Performance-Based Financing (PBF) system (also based on the technical advice of the World Bank) was introduced (MoHS, 2012). Unlike its predecessor which was a fixed grant across PHUs, the performance-based financing grant was based on output – such as the number of deliveries, and ante and neonatal visits – in a PHU as set out in the Basic Package of Essential Health Services (MoHS, 2012). The grant was designed to be implemented with the full involvement of local level village development committees (VDCs) to monitor minimum requirements such as attendance and drug distribution registers. Unfortunately, with the proliferation of VDCs there was chaos over which particular one should be chosen to do this, and the fact that the finance ministry chose to pay the PBF grant directly to the PHUs without reference to the district health management teams increased concerns over mismanagement at the PHU level.

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<sup>160</sup> Interview with a senior staff member of DecSec, Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>161</sup> Interview with the Director of Primary Health Care, MoHS, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>162</sup> Interview with the Director of Primary Health Care, MoHS, Freetown (August, 2014).

We investigated an alleged case of PBF misappropriation in Panguma Village, Kenema District, where the PHU in charge literally copied the names of regular outpatients within the community with unverifiable childbirth records...and presented receipts for renovating the clinic when an NGO had just refurbished the PHU building in less than a month.<sup>163</sup>

In an incident witnessed by the researcher in Bo District Health Management Team (DHMT) offices, a local PHU officer from the Bo area came to submit the paperwork for the PBF grant of the last quarter of 2014, which was only paid around May/June 2015. Apparently, three of the six staff in his health centre had been transferred to other locations and the district health monitoring and evaluation (M&E) officer asked the PHU head to give the money allocated for the management of PHU as part of the PBF allocation – for the staff previously in his centre that have been transferred to other locations – to the Bo DHMT office as their weekend pocket money, and reluctantly the PHU officer did so. The procurement and distribution of drugs, for instance, has also been tainted with corruption and mismanagement. In a 2004 Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS)<sup>164</sup> report, the central medical stores claimed to have distributed drugs and other medical equipment worth over 40 million Leones to the 15 DHMTs across the country. However, feedback from the DMOs suggests that only about 28 million Leones worth of drugs was received (Government of Sierra Leone, 2006).

Health service financing in Sierra Leone is challenged by the lack of a health service financing policy to guide the government's strategic aspiration on funding the health sector. In 2008, as part of the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy – the Agenda for Change, it was proposed that a health insurance scheme should be established as a unit under the National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT). However, it never got off the ground due to conflict over control of the scheme among the ministries of health, labour and social security, and the office of the Chief of Staff at State House.<sup>165</sup> In the absence of a national health insurance scheme and a strategic government policy on health system financing, Sierra Leone operates a semi-commercialised health service system, partly paid for by the state (construction and maintenance of hospitals and salaries for health personnel, for instance) and partly by citizens who pay for consultations, drugs and other services.

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<sup>163</sup> Interview with civil society activist, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>164</sup> A system designed and managed by the finance ministry to track the delivery (and capturing variance between what is supplied and what is received), management and use of central government funds and resources distributed at the centre and allocated to MDAs and local councils for local public service delivery.

<sup>165</sup> Interview with a health economist attached to NASSIT, Freetown (July, 2015).

The haphazard health financing system is further complicated by the fact that Sierra Leone's post-colonial cost recovery health scheme, established in the 1970s, is largely centralised and less known to the public (MoHS, 2004). The lack of information on drug availability and distribution criteria, and the population categories (especially the most vulnerable – children, the old and disabled) who should benefit from some user-fee exemptions, was further exacerbated by the centralised administration of the scheme. Local councils have no direct control over health care workers and the mechanism of drug distribution and management. With the introduction of decentralisation, attempts have been made by several local councils to pay for drugs from local generated revenue for local distribution. But, as one former mayor recounts, accountability has always been a challenge:

In 2009 and 2010, the council bought and donated drugs to the DHMT. Our expectation was that since the drugs were donated free for two consecutive years, the DHMT would have sold them on cost-recovery and turn over the seed money which we would have used as a rolling drugs procurement fund. When a new DMO was posted, he told me the money from the sale of the drugs went to the cost-recovery account in Freetown...how can a local council donate drugs for local use and the proceeds taken to Freetown?<sup>166</sup>

In response to the failures of the cost-recovery system, and as part of the agenda of African governments to promote responsible pro-poor policies and ownership of progressive social development intervention to achieve the MDGs (Whitfield and Fraser, 2009), a Free Health Care Initiative (FHCI) was launched by the President in 2010. The goal is to 'enhance access to basic medical care for approximately 230,000 pregnant and lactating women and 1,000,000 under five children', offering them free consultations, antenatal, birth and postnatal services, minor surgeries, laboratory services, drugs and other logistical support (MoHS, 2012:1-9). At face value, the FHCI should be seen as a step in the right direction, but it has been criticised for its political undertone and lack of broad consultation. As a senior opposition politician noted, 'discussions leading to the President's declaration of the initiative took place at State House with President Koroma as chairman, and with no opposition representation...the initiative was essentially a presidential decree, rather than a peoples' policy'.<sup>167</sup> Indeed, the timing, two years ahead of presidential elections, and the fact that the government reverted to a policy substitution – from the national health insurance

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<sup>166</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>167</sup> Interview with a national executive member of the opposition party, SLPP, Freetown (June, 2015).

scheme set out in the Agenda for Change to the Free Health Care Intervention – it would appear that the President’s launch of the FHCI was an orchestrated political stunt aimed at winning votes through health care populism.

As the free health care was rolled out, its political undertone became its main weakness, and at a critical moment when the government and its donor partners were importing essential drugs and other health equipment to support the initial start-up. Two containers of essential drugs were detained at the Queen Elizabeth II quay due to customs and administrative delays, only for them to be removed later and auctioned in the public market (Awareness Times Newspaper, 1 July, 2011). Across the country, free health care medical supplies were not only inadequate; there were huge logistical problems in transporting and distributing them to the myriad of health centres in the country. Following the presidential declaration, the huge flow of children and nursing mothers to public health facilities across the country led to a shortage of drugs; some patients were turned away from health centres while others complained of having been given ‘fake medicine mixed with chalk-like powder’.<sup>168</sup>

In addition to the institutional management and coordination challenges, the health sector is littered with legislation and policies that are at variance with the LGA. Whilst the National Health Sector Strategic Plan (NHSSP, 2010) sets out the overall priority goals of the health sector, the institutional management of key health facilities is enshrined in the Hospital Boards Act (2003). The Act allowed the health minister to appoint board members for the supervision of hospitals across the country even though hospital management is a devolved function under the Local Government Act. This lack of legal harmonisation created tension between councils and bureaucrats at the MoHS over the control and management of district hospitals. And, although in 2010, the President delegated the cleaning of regional hospitals to local councils following his visit to the Bo Government Hospital and being impressed by how well it was managed by the city council, the MoHs has since recentralised such delegated responsibility, arguing that ‘regional hospitals are too technical for local councils to manage’.<sup>169</sup>

### **5.3 Conclusion**

Apart from compensating for the dearth of empirical analytical reviews of decentralisation and public service delivery in sub-Saharan Africa, this chapter also set

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<sup>168</sup> Comments from participants in a focus group discussion in Kenema City (June, 2015)

<sup>169</sup> Interview with the Director of Primary Health Care, MoHS, Freetown (August, 2014).

itself the task of evidencing a twin-argument on the role of decentralisation in public service improvement and the limits of institutional formalism in analysing the political economy of informality in public policy choices. The chapter identified and explored where, how and why changes have occurred in primary health and basic education service delivery in the four case study localities since the commencement of devolution and identified some of the challenges and contextual dynamics that underpin change and the resistance to it. From the analyses thus far, three conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, the service delivery landscape and its trajectory has changed significantly since 2004, with increasing local service delivery responsibilities, easy local channels of resource access and increased investment in local public service delivery. This has, in part, accounted for a numerical increase in service delivery infrastructures and service users. However, the numerical increase has not been equitably distributed across all sections and classes of society. Despite the overall increase in central government spending on health and education, the progress made has been overshadowed by the fact that Sierra Leone still has some of the worst school enrolment and maternal and child mortality figures in sub-Saharan Africa, and decentralisation is yet to close the rural-urban gap in access to health and basic education at the national level.

Secondly, the chapter critically analysed some of the limits of institutional compliance in tackling preferential treatment of councils by central government as a result of their political party affiliation and discussed the key fault lines between standardised technocratic policy-making processes and informal relations in the planning and implementation of public service delivery, and the competing and varied interpretation of the confused national legal framework over public service delivery authority and resources.

Finally, the challenges of corruption, mismanagement and lack of donor trust in local council entities provide strong analytical variables in understanding the limitations of local public service delivery. The struggle over the management and control of local public service delivery admits growing donor mistrust of public institutions' fiscal management of local service delivery, and partly accounts for the NGO takeover of public service delivery. While some progress has been made, it is too early to pass a vote of confidence in the Sierra Leone decentralisation project. Besides, the health and education sectors had long histories of administrative deconcentration in their service delivery at the local level before 2004, although the 2004 decentralisation project was an

attempt to democratise local public service delivery with public participation and oversight.

## Chapter Six

### **Cross-Council Service Delivery and Management Performance Variations: Alternative Explanations**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

The empirical evidence in Chapter Four of this thesis questions the validity of the political affiliation and resources access argument in fiscal decentralisation and its taunted ‘spatial dimension of inequality’ between local council areas considered the strongholds or opposed to the ruling political party (Abdulai and Hickey, 2016:46). There are generally two competing perspectives regarding the public spending motivations and priorities of governing political parties in decentralisation programmes in Africa (van Wyk, 2007; Banful, 2011; Briggs, 2012). The first suggest that that political elites disproportionately target public resources towards their political strongholds where they are guaranteed of loyal support, ‘both as a reward for existing and previous political backing and as a down payment for its continuation’ (Abdulai and Hickey 2016:45). The second perspective argues that in many instances, rather than spending resources in political strongholds, African political elites have targeted spending in ‘opposition strongholds or to “swing” areas in an effort to induce them with development benefits’ (Abdulai and Hickey, 2016:45). Such opposition targeted spending is based on the fact that strongholds can be taken for granted as solid block votes, and even neglected in the process.

It is no surprise therefore, that in donor-led decentralisation interventions in Africa, emphasis is placed on supposedly apolitical technocratic neoliberal institutionalism, design to limit the influence of party politics in intergovernmental fiscal relations (Schmidt, 1996; Kefer, 2002; Ahmad et al., 2005; Crawford and Hartman, 2008). This chapter argues that while such analyses and their neoliberal institutional management strategies may be useful in understanding political party alliances, voting preferences and resources distribution, they mostly fail to explain how complex context-specific socio-political and cultural relations influence public policy choices, and local public service delivery and management performance variations among local councils, outside the strict domain of political stronghold and political opposition.

This chapter suggest that a critical political economy approach based on a nuanced analysis of context-specific realities and patterns of socio-political association and mobilisation provides compelling and plausible alternative explanations for the service

delivery and management performance variations between pro-ruling and pro-opposition local councils, where the party politics argument has failed. The aim is to provide an answer to the thesis's second sub-research question which seeks to provide a strong, context-specific explanation of the management performance and service delivery variations between pro-government and pro-opposition local councils in this study.

Following David Keen's (1995, 1998, 2003, 2003, 2005) political economy of war and his motive and benefit analysis in conflict and civil wars, this chapter focuses on the changing nature of motives, incentives and public choice preferences over a long period in complex post-war multi-relational contexts, to explain service delivery and management performance variations between pro-government and opposition local councils in Sierra Leone's decentralisation landscape. It argues that contrary to the political affiliation and resources access argument often evoked to justify neoliberal institutionalism in fiscal decentralisation and governance reform programmes in Africa, empirical evidence from Sierra Leone's case study shows that the forces that shape public service delivery and management performance, are not those of resource access and allocation linked to a council's political association and voting preferences, but from the complex network of political, social and economic relationship that change over time. Where the central government is actively seeking to co-opt an opposition area for vote aggregation, opposition councils may receive more resources than ruling party councils. The evidence from Sierra Leone also shows that, opposition councils have cumulatively and consistently performed better in public service delivery and public sector management, than those of the ruling party. This is partly because 'institutional performance outcomes cannot be explained without reference to local-level configurations of power and interest' in order to understand and interpret those context-specific circumstances that influence policy preferences and change (Boone, 2003:10). Therefore, the promotion in the developing world of neoliberal market-oriented public service delivery strategies that favour fiscal discipline, institutional and technocratic formalism, emanating principally from the World Bank's ideological foundations (Przeworski, 1992; Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Cammack, 2002; Owusu, 2003; Peet, 2003; Steger and Roy, 2010), ignores local processes of power, kinship relations, rent-seeking and patron-client networks (Reno, 1995; Khan, 2005; Keefer, 2007).

In this chapter, these long term and context-specific local configurations of power, patron-client politics, socio-cultural kinship relationships and interests are explored and analysed as the basis for explaining the variations in public service delivery among councils in Sierra Leone. The subsequent sub-sections proffer four interconnected context-specific political and socio-economic variables as plausible alternative explanations – beyond the political affiliation or party politics argument – for the management performance and service delivery variations among the four case study councils. They include a council's capacity for local resource mobilisation and efficient management; political will and commitment to service delivery from a council's elected political leadership; the manipulation of political victimisation and co-option, and the lethargy of incumbency; and, lastly, the motivation of political revival in opposition councils.

### **6.1 Performance Output: A Matter of Own-Source Revenue?**

The case for sound and reliable local revenue generation as the basis for successful fiscal autonomy and accountability in local public service delivery has been well documented in the fiscal decentralisation literature (Huther and Shah, 1998; Oates, 1993; Bird, 2010; Martinez-Vázquez and Smoke, 2010; Fjeldstad and Heggstad, 2012). Whilst the aim of this study is not to completely invalidate such arguments, the thesis argues that there is a tendency within this neoliberal tradition to overemphasise the revenue expenditure responsibilities of local councils without similar emphasis on their revenue generation capacity and, crucially, the 'political will' of national and local level politicians (Philip, 1997; Kosack, 2009; Post et al., 2010) to commit to effective, open and participatory public sector management reform and public service delivery (Garman et al., 2001).

Local councils in Sierra Leone have two main sources of revenue: own source revenue and central government transfers (LGA, 2004; Kragbo, 2009). Considering that the local tax is predetermined by the local government ministry (see Chapter One) and central transfers are largely tied to specific responsibilities determined by a pre-agreed formula (see Chapter Four), locally-generated revenue provides an avenue of autonomy for councils to plan and implement local services outside central government control (Martinez-Vázquez and Smoke, 2010; Fjeldstad and Heggstad, 2012). However, the capacity of local councils to mobilise and generate resources locally differs remarkably. As the analysis in Chapter Four shows, Freetown City Council has the highest own-

source revenue output among the 19 local councils, yet it is also one of the worst performing councils as per the local councils’ comprehensive framework. This suggests that while resources are important, political commitment and effective administrative management are also important prerequisites for effective service delivery.

**Table 9: Councils’ Own-Source Revenue for Selected Years (in Billion Leones)**

No.	Council	2005	2006	2008	2010	2012	2013
1	Bo City	622.97	583.20	520.73	1,119.03	1,088.84	1,149.46
2	Kenema City	497.32	416.08	519.31	787.48	921.78	988.56
3	Makeni City	226.10	232.20	172.34	291.13	539.84	748.65
4	Port Loko District	14.60	38.00	113.54	67.78	341.28	357.00
	<b>Total (billion Leones)</b>	<b>1,360.99</b>	<b>1,269.48</b>	<b>1,325.92</b>	<b>2,265.42</b>	<b>2,891.74</b>	<b>3,243.67</b>

Source: LGFD Data (2014)

There were positive indications of improving levels of own-source revenue (OSR) in Makeni City Council at the inception of decentralisation: the council had increased its total OSR by close to 3%, from 226 million in 2005 to 232 million Leones in 2006. Unfortunately, this momentum was short-lived; in 2008 the city reported a decrease of over 60 million Leones from its local revenue mobilisation drive during the preceding year (Kargbo, 2009). The initial growth in the city’s locally-generated revenue was spearheaded by vigorous tax mobilisation, civic education and a review of the property tax made possible by technical support to the council’s Tax Valuation Unit by Paul Fish from the NGO Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) (Jibao and Prichard, 2013). This initial momentum later lost traction as powerful local political elites within the city soon refused to pay their property rates, instead using their political connections to evade taxes to the extent that council staff were even given clear instructions to avoid certain homes in their tax collection drive; some council tax collectors printed their own non-official tax receipt books.<sup>170</sup> The implication was, since their receipt books were not official, the council lost huge sums of money both as a result of tax evasion by powerful property-owning elites, and the fact that taxes collected with unofficial receipt books were pocketed by individual tax collectors.

The tax avoidance syndicate meant that the Dollar Men – a group of informal (or so-called black market) currency exchangers who were contracted by the council to collect market dues were running at a loss as the daily revenue collected could barely pay the

<sup>170</sup> Interview with a local council staff member formerly attached to Makeni City Council.

contracted daily amount of 750,000 Leones due to the council. The group had to sometimes – especially at the peak of the rainy season (June–August) when the tax collection rate is low - renege on its contractual obligation with the city council, by not paying the actual contractual amount<sup>171</sup> which led to the termination of the market dues collection contract with the Dollar Men in 2012. What remains unclear is the decision of the local council to contract a group of black-market currency exchangers for local tax collection. According to one civil society activist in Makeni, although the ‘Dollar Men’ were official registered with the local council and the social welfare ministry as a community-based youth organisation, most of their members are active APC party supporters and mobilisers ‘who had to be compensated for their loyalty to the APC despite overtures from the then ruling SLPP’.<sup>172</sup> Subsequently, and in line with the political patronage and rent-seeking critique of African politics and political party funding mechanisms (Easterly and Lenine, 1997; Tendler and Freedheim, 1994; Biezen and Kopecky, 2007), the market dues contract was handed over to Lamtales Construction and Building Enterprise without due bidding and contracting procedure.<sup>173</sup> The council’s decision can be explained in part by the fact the Lamtales enterprise was owned by a senior executive member of the APC party in Makeni who had earlier failed in his bid for the APC’s mayoral nomination for Makeni City Council in the 2012 local council elections.<sup>174</sup> In what looked like a political strategy to compensate party members, the council’s politically-motivated contracting decision was not taken in the best economic interest of the council and its residents as the transfer of the tax collection contract to a party crony led to corruption and subsequent depletion of the council’s local revenue mobilisation drive (Conteh, 2014; Rachel, 2015).

While Makeni’s local revenue mobilisation plummeted, the situations in Bo and Kenema were completely different. Bo City Council, for instance, made tremendous achievements in its local revenue drive, steadily improving its local revenue from 622 million Leones in 2005 to over 1.1 billion Leones by 2013 – reaching over 80% of its annual own-source revenue target (Bo City Council, 2014). Although a sizeable proportion of the council’s locally-generated revenue in the earlier years of decentralisation came from market dues and less from property taxes, Bo performed better in per capita terms than all the other city councils (Jibao and Prichard, 2013). Bo

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<sup>171</sup> Interview with the former chairman of Dollar Men, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>172</sup> Interview with the former chairman of Dollar Men, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>173</sup> Interview with the chairman of Budget Advocacy Network (BAN), Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>174</sup> Interview with the chairman of Budget Advocacy Network (BAN), Makeni City (July, 2015).

City Council's effective resource mobilisation and management drive in part explain its excellent performance ranking in the CLoGPAS: for a council outside Freetown to develop an organised, strong, efficient and transparent local revenue structure, supervised by an effective and committed political and administrative team 'was a commendable achievement'.<sup>175</sup> But it is important to note that outside this technocratic explanation, Bo City has the strongest economic base among the country's provincial city and municipal councils due to its status as the country's second capital, the biggest urban settlement outside Freetown and the economic centre in the south-eastern region of Sierra Leone (Jibao and Prichard, 2013).

Unlike Makeni, Bo never outsourced market dues collection, instead used its existing tax collectors for tax enforcement. The city was divided into tax collection zones, collectors deployed in different zones in different weeks and agreed weekly, monthly and quarterly collection targets set. The council's tax receipts books were securely printed and issued first thing in the morning before collectors departed for the day; collectors were also incentivised with 2.5% cashback of all monthly collections.<sup>176</sup> In this way, employees were motivated to collect more, as they earned more, and were under the supervision of a clear management structure that ensured all daily collections are reconciled with the council's finance office. The council's senior valuation officer also randomly visited collection hot spot, to verify tax receipts with traders. Backed by a robust tax education and sensitisation programme through radio discussion and general council meetings, the council effectively engaged the tax-paying public in a manner that gave citizens a say in the way resources are generated and utilised.<sup>177</sup>

However, Bo City's biggest local revenue stream was from property taxes: following the example of Makeni, the city engaged the technical expertise of Paul Fish to support its tax mobilisation drive (Jibao and Prichard, 2013). Fish's work, together with the assistance of Revenue Development Foundation (RDF), an international NGO, 'led to the establishment of a property cadastral system that registered over 10,000 properties within the city and increased the council's tax collection base'.<sup>178</sup> The successful rollout of the cadastral system and the effective public engagement and transparency in property taxes – property owners paid their taxes directly to the council's bank account

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<sup>175</sup> Interview with the Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, Decentralization Secretariat, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>176</sup> Interview with the Evaluation Officer, Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>177</sup> Interview with the Ombudsman, Southern Region; Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>178</sup> Interview with the Evaluation Officer, Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

rather than to individual council tax collectors – promoted increased public trust and confidence in the council’s financial management and generated a ‘culture of willingness to pay taxes’.<sup>179</sup> And, as one Bo City resident suggested, the city’s high literacy levels and its transparent engagement with the public not only defeated social structures of tax evasion, they promoted a ‘culture of civic responsibility’ that increased the council’s revenue tremendously; from about 500 million in 2008 to over 1.1 billion Leones by 2010.<sup>180</sup>

Kenema, on the other hand, has always been the little sister of Bo, learning and benefitting from the expertise of Bo City Council’s Valuation Officer who was recruited and trained by RDF.<sup>181</sup> The Local Government Finance Department (LGFD) also commissioned Paul Fish to conduct a property survey and develop a cadastral system similar to those of Makeni and Bo City Councils (Jibao and Prichard, 2013). Unfortunately, unlike the robust and transparent cadastral system installed in Bo by the Revenue Development Foundation, Kenema opted to work with a local research group, the Organisation for Environmental Development, which installed a cadastral IT system that was bereft of the transparency and security control mechanisms installed in Bo City. The weak IT security network in Kenema meant that council staffs could print illegal invoices and receipts from the system, by-passing IT security.<sup>182</sup> Regardless of these technical flaws, the reformed property tax system increased the council’s revenue collection in the short term, from 519 million in 2008 to about 800 million Leones by 2010. But Kenema’s local revenue growth still lagged behind that of Bo, both in absolute and in per capita terms (Jibao and Prichard, 2013). As in Makeni, the technical limitations of the IT system in Kenema meant that the top political and business elites evaded taxes by establishing a syndicate in which the city’s potential property tax payers, rather than paying their taxes through official council payment channels, they instead paid a smaller amount direct to the councils’ tax collectors, and in the process defraud the council.<sup>183</sup> The high level of tax evasion and the lack of serious engagement with the tax-paying public undermined revenue collection, spread tax-paying apathy among the city’s residents (Jibao and Prichard, 2013) and turned market dues collection into cash cows for the council’s employees. The chief administrator stated:

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<sup>179</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council (June, 2015).

<sup>180</sup> Interview with a Bo City resident, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>181</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council (June, 2015).

<sup>182</sup> Interview with the CA of Kenema City Council, Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>183</sup> Interview with the CA of Kenema City Council, Kenema City (June, 2015).

[The] council's market dues collectors call me 'Mr Pump Lock' because I have closed the waste pipe that pumps money to them. When I took over, casual council employees on monthly salaries of less than Le 350,000 [about \$80] had all built massive houses and were driving expensive cars. I have outsourced the market dues collection (which used to generate about 15 million Leones a month) to a local organisation called Lion Mountain [which now collects] 60 million Leones a month...enough to pay all staff monthly salaries including the 25% council contribution to staff salaries and a 500,000 Leones bonus to all council core staff.<sup>184</sup>

The decision to outsource the market dues collection in Kenema increased the council's local revenue accrued from that sector, but the political and socio-economic motivations and the processes leading to the outsourcing of the market dues to the local NGO Lion Mountain remain suspicious and unclear. And, like the case of Lamtales Enterprises in Makeni, the director of Lion Mountain is believed to be an active SLPP (the governing political party of Kenema City Council) supporter and financier.<sup>185</sup>

Where Makeni and Kenema had politicised, corrupt and malfunctioning tax mobilisation institutions, Port Loko District Council had virtually none. The council itself is one of the biggest by population size, its area covering a collection of fairly big towns such Lunsar, Masiaka, Lungi, Gbinti and Mangi, and are 'mostly unwilling to be politically administered under one roof located at the district's headquarter town of Port Loko'.<sup>186</sup> The complex geo-political nature of the district suggests that at the inception of decentralisation the council could only control market dues collection within Port Loko towns. However, an agreement was made around November 2010 between the Port Loko District Council and the 11 chiefdom councils within the district for the chiefdom councils to collect the market dues for and on behalf of the district council keep 35% and pay the remaining 65% to the council.<sup>187</sup> However, with the tacit approval of national politicians, the agreement was flagrantly violated by many paramount chiefs, making Port Loko District Council one of the worst-performing councils in local revenue mobilisation at the commencement of devolution (MoFED, 2006).

A few months ago, the council's tax collectors clashed with chiefdom revenue collectors at a popular periodic market centre [which operates three days in a week] called Barmoi. When the matter got to the DO, he supported the chiefdom authorities over the district council ... as the

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<sup>184</sup> Interview with the CA of Kenema City Council, Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>185</sup> Interview with a civil society activist, Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>186</sup> Interview with the Chairman of Port Loko District Council, Port Loko (July, 2015).

<sup>187</sup> Interview with the former CA of Port Loko District Council, Makeni City (July, 2015).

council was told to develop its property tax capacity and find a way of resolving the problem with the chiefdoms.<sup>188</sup>

The district's revenue mobilisation drive was not only faced with competition from chiefdom authorities in areas designated by the Local Government Act as local sources of revenue; its inability to engage with the tax-paying public – to make a case why a property tax is important – was a major challenge.<sup>189</sup> In 2010, for instance, of the 225 million Leones generated from local revenue sources, almost all of it came from local taxes, business licenses and fees; none came from property taxes and market dues.<sup>190</sup> The challenge for Port Loko, unlike the other councils in this study, is the fact that at the time of dissolution of the post-colonial local government system in 1972, the functions of the district councils were shared between the deconcentrated role of district officer (DO) and the chiefdom councils (Jackson 2005, 2006). Prior to the introduction of local councils, local tax collection was the exclusive purview of chiefdom councils (Fanthorpe et al., 2011), but this arrangement was altered by the LGA (2004) which gave powers to local councils to determine the local tax rate and collect local taxes. This provision of the LGA put local councils and chiefdom authorities on a collision course in local resource mobilisation especially when, in 2008, the local government ministry unilaterally decided to set the local tax levels and empower chiefdom authorities to collect local taxes and share with local councils. Unlike Port Loko, the former town councils (now city councils) of Bo, Kenema and Makeni – then supervised by central government appointed management committees – maintained their functions of local tax collection at the township level. At the reintroduction of local councils therefore, a tax-paying culture among the residents existed in the city councils without the parallel local tax collection agencies – such as chiefdom councils – present in the district councils.<sup>191</sup>

## **6.2 Beyond Patron-Client Politics: Political Will and Political Stability**

It is not uncommon for the phrase 'political will', or the lack of it, to be associated with the outcome of development interventions, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Post et al., 2010). But as Abazović and Mujkić (2015:12) argue, 'political will' is a loaded and sometimes vaguely used concept, deployed mostly to discuss the 'absence of something which we know very little about, but at the same time one of the most important

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<sup>188</sup> Interview with the CA of Port Loko District Council, Port Loko Town (July, 2015).

<sup>189</sup> Interview with a civil society activist, Port Loko Town (June, 2015).

<sup>190</sup> Inspection of Port Loko District Council income and expenditure statement for 2010.

<sup>191</sup> Interview with the former CA and now DO, Makeni City (July, 2015).

concepts to describe our political reality'. It is partly for this reason that Post et al. (2010:654) argue that 'political will is the sine qua non of policy success which is never defined except by its absence', and why Eaton et al. (2010) suggest that the success of decentralisation hinges on the commitment of a proactive political class who are willing to let decentralisation succeed. However, the phrase generally suggests the commitment and willingness of an individual or a group of political and bureaucratic actors to act in the interest of the common good (Rose and Greeley, 2006; Kosack, 2009; Post et al., 2010). This thesis analyses political-will based on the commitment of the elected political leadership of a council to plan, manage and deliver services in the interests of their constituents rather than their personal or political interest. This section provides an analysis of how political-will and political stability in Bo City Council, and its absence in the other case study councils, partly explains Bo's exemplary performance relative to its comparators in this study.

At the inception of decentralisation, with uncertainties over what the local governance renaissance held for rural governance and local public service in Sierra Leone after three decades of centralisation, the election of Dr Wusu Sannoh – a successful university professor widely acknowledged and respected for his selflessness and commitment to the southern region – became one of the biggest political decisions taken by Bo City residents.<sup>192</sup> Mayor Sannoh, originally from Moyamba District, won successive elections in 2004 and 2008: even though he is considered a 'stranger' in Bo, he was able to win support from across the political divide in the city. He reached out to the dominant Mende tribe and pro-SLPP constituency that nominated him and also won the support of the Temne-speaking northern traders, who saw him as someone outside the Bo City Mende-led SLPP clique:

I don't believe I need to be an indigene of Bo to succeed in local governance. My 'stranger' position, but strong commitment to the SLPP, without alienating the Temne-speaking non-SLPP residents of Bo, helped me build a broader appeal. The traders and market women – traditionally sympathetic to the APC – all supported me because they saw me as their mayor, not an exclusive SLPP mayor...and my drive to improve conditions in their markets encouraged them to pay taxes.<sup>193</sup>

During his tenure, Mayor Sannoh built a good relationship with the Minister of Local Government, Ambassador Dauada Kamara – his university colleague. Even though the

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<sup>192</sup> At the height of the rebel war when the Makonde campus of Njala University was moved to Freetown, Dr Sannoh stayed in Bo – convinced that the campus should have been moved to Bo and not Freetown – commuting weekly to teach in Freetown.

<sup>193</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council (June, 2015).

two men belong to opposing political parties, they maintained collegial and friendly relations.<sup>194</sup> While Sannoh exploited his relationships to his advantage, he was careful to maintain a fine line between personal networks and his political commitment to the SLPP. In 2009, for instance, Sannoh was approached by President Koroma of the ruling APC party, to serve as education minister, but he ‘politely rejected the offer’, preferring to serve Bo City instead, and to cooperate with government at the local government level.<sup>195</sup> However, he did use his connections with national politicians to challenge issues of inefficiency and direct political interference in the management of the affairs of his council. In 2010, for instance, the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC) made repeated attempts to appoint Bo City Council’s official bailiff<sup>196</sup> as deputy chief administrator). Even when asked by his friend – the local government minister - Sannoh refused to endorse his appointment as he considered the proposed candidate unfit for the office because he had once caught him falsifying receipts in an attempt to defraud the council.<sup>197</sup>

Within months of starting his mayoral tenure, Sannoh was able to put together and maintain a team of capable and productive administrative personnel including his results-oriented CA who in addition to his extroverted nature, has been repeatedly named the best performing CA in the local government system.<sup>198</sup> He accorded significant levels of autonomy in the everyday running of the council to his team – leading to responsibility-taking and innovative decision-making. Sannoh’s political commitment to open and transparent local service delivery processes won him both local and international trust accompanied by external financial and material support for local service delivery projects in his council.<sup>199</sup> In 2009 and 2010, for instance, Bo and Makeni City Councils implemented a city waste management project jointly funded by One World Link, Warwickshire County Council and the UNDP. At Bo City Council, the mayor and his team ensured the project was managed by the council’s environmental health officer (EHO).<sup>200</sup> An eight-acre area of land situated in the outer suburbs of Bo City was identified as a safe waste deposit site and large bins for waste

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<sup>194</sup> Interview with the former minister of local government, Freetown (May, 2015).

<sup>195</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council (June, 2015).

<sup>196</sup> Most city councils in Sierra Leone have in-house bailiffs who enforce the councils’ official eviction orders. This role might be slightly different as defined or used in English Common Law.

<sup>197</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council (June, 2015).

<sup>198</sup> Interview with the former CA of Bo City Council, Makeni City (June, 2015).

<sup>199</sup> Interview with the UNDP Head of Governance and Political Affairs Portfolio, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>200</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council (June, 2015).

disposal and collection were distributed across the city. At Makeni City Council, it was a different story. The waste management project was not managed by the relevant council personnel, instead being moved from one staff member to another, as the mayor deemed fit. As Conteh (2014) noted, the rationale behind senior council staff controlling the waste management project rather than the council's environmental officer, cannot be unrelated to the desire of council senior management staff to control the donor funding associated with the project.

During Mayor Sannoh's tenure, Bo City Council established and maintained a functioning waste management system (combining monthly city cleaning, waste deposit sites and solid waste management), improvement of feeder roads, a city transport system with the purchase of two buses, and the establishment of a city funeral parlour – the first outside Freetown.<sup>201</sup> Rated the best performing council in successive Comprehensive Local Government Performance Assessment Survey (CLOGPAS) evaluations, Sannoh's reign demonstrated how strong political will, stable leadership and local civic engagement could win the trust of both the people and external donors, and promote effective local revenue mobilisation and transparent principal-agent relations in local public service delivery.<sup>202</sup>

Where Bo had a stable and committed political leadership, Makeni was the complete opposite. Since 2004, the city has had four mayors – with none completing more than a single four-year term.<sup>203</sup> The city's first mayor, Musa Mansaray, was succeeded by Councillor Andrew Kanu, after both the mayor and his deputy were forced to resign following an intra-party conflict. Even before their resignation, there was already an unhealthy working relationship between senior APC party members and the mayor within the city of Makeni, fuelled largely by the desire of APC party elites to control council resources to distribute patronage.<sup>204</sup> Mayor Kanu was determined to run a 'clean and corruption free council; one that will not succumb to political pressure by looting the council's resources to pay party officials, who frequently make such demands from local council politicians'<sup>205</sup> Mayor Kanu's unwillingness to distribute patronage led to his inability to secure his party's mayoral nomination for the 2008 local council elections, a move believed to have been orchestrated by powerful party politicians to punish him

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<sup>201</sup> Interview with the former Mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>202</sup> Interview with Southern Region Ombudsman, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>203</sup> Interview with a senior lecturer, University of Makeni, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>204</sup> Interview with a senior lecturer, University of Makeni, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>205</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Makeni City Council; Makeni City (July, 2015).

(Bolten, 2008).<sup>206</sup> Eventually, the APC chose Moses Sesay as the mayoral candidate for Makeni City Council for the 2008 local council elections. But unlike the political will and stable leadership of Bo, Moses' mayoral tenure was tainted by his lack of genuine political commitment to service delivery, admits a politically and administratively divided council:

Moses inherited a highly-divided council with an uncooperative chief administrator...but Moses himself had no sense of political commitment and political goal to achieve. He was disrespectful to party elders, almost always in Freetown...and [had a] poor relationship with his CA, his deputy and many councillors. He dug his grave when he took the hospital cleaning contract from Alie Commoner – the APC party district chairman - and handed it to another contractor.<sup>207</sup>

Mayor Sesay's first term ended with no clear political and development agenda for the city of Makeni, apart from his good relationship with the President (who is also from Makeni), and had also 'stepped on the toes' of many APC notables – most of whom make a living through council contracts.<sup>208</sup> When the APC opted for an electoral college-like system for selecting its candidates for parliament and local councils, the process was hijacked by powerful party officials who manipulated the election of their preferred candidates.

Where the Makeni scenario prevented the effective management of resources and public service delivery, it was even more alarming in the pro-APC council of Port Loko. Following the manipulation of the 2004 local council election results that robbed the APC of the Koya ward councillor seat,<sup>209</sup> the SLPP was able to elect one of its own; councillor John B. Amara as council chairman. Unfortunately, the chairman was unable to govern effectively as half the councillors were from the APC, and almost always able to block the chairman's decisions and initiatives. The standoff meant that, despite the calibre of councillors elected in the 2004-2008 cohorts, the council was divided, 'disagreeing on where to construct schools and even the collection of market dues'.<sup>210</sup> By 2007, when the APC won the general election, the political climate in the predominantly APC district had become uncomfortable for Chairman Amara. He was practically forced to abandon his office and moved to Freetown – relinquishing his duties to the council's chief administrator who was then district officer in Port Loko

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<sup>206</sup> Interview with a senior lecturer, University of Makeni, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>207</sup> Interview with a senior lecturer, University of Makeni, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>208</sup> Interview with a senior lecturer, University of Makeni, Makeni City (July, 2015)

<sup>209</sup> See section 6.3 below.

<sup>210</sup> Interview with a former CA of Port Loko District Council, Makeni City; (July, 2015).

district at the commencement of decentralisation in 2004 and then became Chief Administrator as all serving District Officers were transformed as CAs as a temporary measure before the recruitment of full time local council employees in 2009.<sup>211</sup>

By the second local council elections in 2008, the APC had taken full control of the council, as Chairman Amara had been replaced by Ahmid Fofanah of the APC. In line with the argument on patronage politics and political *godfatherism* in sub-Saharan Africa (Omobowale and Olutayo, 2007; Olarinmoye, 2008; Oarhe, 2010), Chairman Fofanah himself was chosen as the APC candidate for Port District Council over Councillor Alusine Tarawalie, a veteran educator and popular local politician who was the party's nominee for chairmanship in 2004, running against the SLPP's councillor, JB Amara.<sup>212</sup> Therefore, from the onset, Fofanah's chairmanship was set to face challenges, as he was 'drafted into the job by top APC operatives in order to eliminate Councillor Tarawalie'.<sup>213</sup> As in Makeni, where the distribution of favour to political godfathers is crucial to political survival, Chairman Fofanah was expected to pay back his godfathers.<sup>214</sup> Indeed, Fofanah attempted to do so when he awarded the Port Loko Township Water Rehabilitation Project to a company known simply as Nile which was linked to Kemoh Sesay, a government minister and senior APC party official from Port Loko. However, the chairman angered his godfather when he awarded the contract for the construction of the township's mini-stadium to an independent company outside the interest of his godfather; Kemoh Sesay, who subsequently instigated a rebellion within the council, led by the deputy council chairperson, Councillor Neneh Turay.<sup>215</sup>

There were pro-Fofanah and pro-Neneh camps among the councillors; both supported by two major political factions within the district. The Neneh camp was supported by Kemoh Sesay, while Chairman Fofanah was supported by Alpha Kanu [both indigenes of Port Loko, top APC members and serving government ministers]. Nothing was done during this period, as each camp rejected the other's development proposals. At the height of the fighting, the chairman was held hostage in his office by a group of councillors aligned with his deputy. Council staff were unfortunately, caught up in the infighting.<sup>216</sup>

From 2004 to 2012, Port Loko District Council was embroiled in political infighting and lacked the political will and stability to push through successful management

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<sup>211</sup> Interview with a former CA of Port Loko District Council, Makeni City; July 2015

<sup>212</sup> Interview with the Port Loko District APC chairman, Port Loko August, 2014

<sup>213</sup> Interview with a senior lecturer of Port Loko Teachers' College, Port Loko, July, 2015

<sup>214</sup> Interview with a local journalist in Port Loko, Port Loko Town (June, 2015).

<sup>215</sup> Interview with a local journalist in Port Loko, Port Loko Town (June, 2015).

<sup>216</sup> Interview with the former CA of Port Loko District Council, Makeni City; (July, 2015).

reforms and service delivery. Residents of the district became so disillusioned that they submitted a petition to the APC party district headquarters, calling for the replacement of both the chairman and his deputy.<sup>217</sup> But in the 2012 primary elections for the endorsement of the APC candidate for Port Loko District Council chairmanship before the general elections, Chairman Fofanah was chosen over his deputy and main challenger – Neneh Turay – a decision that settled the dust over the Fofanah-Neneh division political dichotomy after Chairman Fofanah’s victory in the local council elections.

Kenema, like Makeni, has had four mayors since 2004.<sup>218</sup> Mayor Evans Gbemeh was elected in 2004, but passed away in 2007. He was succeeded by Councillor Brima Kargbo, a former chairman of the then Kenema Town Council before the introduction of decentralisation, and who had been a popular mayoral candidate for the Kenema City Council’s 2004 mayoral seat; he was chosen over Gbemeh’s deputy, councillor Margaret Shaika. The decision to choose Councillor (popularly known as Chief Brima Kargbo) Brima Kargbo over Councillor Shaika to complete the late Mayor Gbemeh’s term divided the council and led to factions like those in Port Loko – especially the anti-Kargbo group that saw him as a Limba from the northern region, even though he was born and raised in Kenema.<sup>219</sup> However, Mayor Kargbo held on and was elected mayor by popular mandate in 2008. Unfortunately, he also died before completing his term, and was succeeded by his deputy – Madam Shaika – in 2011. She was known by insiders within SLPP Kenema City politics, as a ‘hardliner’; unwilling to pay political patrons and with a strong political will and commitment to public service that alienated her from top party king-makers.<sup>220</sup> Close to the 2012 local council elections, Madam Shaika was passed over for the SLPP’s nomination as mayoral candidate for Kenema City Council in favour of Joseph Kaifala, a retired civil servant.<sup>221</sup>

The ubiquitous nature of patron-client politics in Sierra Leone’s governance system is, in itself, not new. Reno (1995) has long described this phenomenon as the invisible hand of the shadow state in African politics. What is alarming, however, is the fact that political leaders are willing to sacrifice their own if they are suspected of being unwilling to play by the rules of party and ethno-regional politics. However, Kenema’s political

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<sup>217</sup> Interview with a local journalist in Port Loko, Port Loko Town (June, 2015).

<sup>218</sup> List of mayors and councillors of KCC– KCC Human Resources Unit (June, 2015).

<sup>219</sup> Interview with a long-term councillor of Kenema City Council, Kenema City (May, 2015).

<sup>220</sup> Interview with a long-term councillor of Kenema City Council, Kenema City (May, 2015).

<sup>221</sup> Interview with a long-term councillor of Kenema City Council, Kenema City (May, 2015).

leadership challenges and its inability to deliver public services – relative to Bo for instance – was hindered by the very nature of its politics. Where Bo is perceived as a liberal city with a diverse population and developing business and property-owning class of so-called strangers, Kenema residents, including its political leadership – without a deliberate intention by this researcher to attribute generalised subjectivities to its inhabitants – are perceived as ‘conservatives, and unreceptive to strangers and anything not Mende or SLPP’.<sup>222</sup>

In 2008, for instance, the government funded the upgrading of over 25 kilometres of city roads in Kenema, as it did for other towns and cities across the country. Since it was the councils’ prerogative to choose which streets were to be upgraded, Kenema City Council authorities deliberately chose streets outside the city centre – despite the deplorable condition of those in the city centre – to give a public impression that the APC-led government had not upgraded the city’s main streets. Similarly, when, in the run-up to the 2012 election, the central government funded a solar street light project for major town and cities, the Kenema City Council’s political leadership again chose to erect the solar lights outside the city centre and referred to them as ‘candle lights’ and ‘APC campaign machines.’<sup>223</sup> Council officials argued, however, that their decision was meant to lure the government to do more for the city.<sup>224</sup> The uncompromising politics of Kenema not only deprived the city of valuable state-controlled resources, they also frequently put it in conflict with central government over authority on issues such as land reform and the management of public infrastructure (Standard Times Newspaper, 23 May, 2013).

However, political leadership across local councils is not static. In 2012, for instance, with Mayor Sannoh having completed his maximum two terms,<sup>225</sup> a new mayor, Harold Tucker, was elected in Bo City . However, the city’s residents refer to him as a ‘one term mayor’, a derogatory expression suggesting their disapproval with him to be elected for second term as mayor when his first four year term expires – and he has been widely accused of corruption, a less inclusive approach and a lack of political will.<sup>226</sup> Although Bo City remains among the top five performing councils in the country, it has lost its coveted first position in the CLoGPAS – dropping from first in 2011 to fifth in 2013

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<sup>222</sup> Interview with a senior lecturer of the University of Sierra Leone; Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>223</sup> Interview with the chairman – Coalition of CSO’s, eastern region, Kenema City; (May, 2015).

<sup>224</sup> Interview with a long-term councillor of Kenema City Council, Kenema City (May, 2015).

<sup>225</sup> As provided for by the LGA 2004.

<sup>226</sup> The phrase ‘one term mayor’ was popular among young men in the Ataya bases (or coffee drinking shops) and clubs during focus group discussions and hang-out in Bo City during field research.

(DecSec, 2015). This came at a time when Mayor Tucker had a fractured relationship with William Alpha, the council's long term CA, leading to Alpha being transferred to Makeni; allegedly orchestrated by Mayor Tucker, who had accused Alpha of supporting his opponent during the intra-party contest for the SLPP mayoral endorsement for Bo City Council election in 2012.<sup>227</sup>

In Port Loko however, some semblance of stability has been restored in Chairman Fofanah's administration in the absence of his bitter rival, Councillor Neneh. The council has seen progress in the CLoGPAS evaluations – ranked among the seven best performers in the 2013 assessment, up from sixteenth in 2011. In Makeni, the city's female mayor – Councillor Sunkari Kabba – since 2012, came to office with over a decade's experience in development management with UN children's agency, UNICEF. And with William Alpha, the former Bo City Council CA, now posted to Makeni, the council has seen tremendous progress, both in its local resources mobilisation and management performance ranking (DecSec, 2015). The change of political leadership in Bo and Makeni and the seeming stability in Port Loko also brought to the fore the role of political stability and political will in local level governance.

### **6.3 Negative Capabilities: Political Victimisation and Political Co-Option**

Sierra Leone's decentralisation project was rolled out based on democratic devolution (Manor 1999; Crawford and Hartman, 2008) with political parties as active players in the electoral and governance processes. The country's two main political parties and their ethno-regional bifurcation (Kandeh, 1992:81) between them have almost equal control of the 19 local councils in the country (10 APC and 9 SLPP). But the 2007 presidential and parliamentary triumph of the then opposition (1996-2007) APC reenergised a familiar game of political witch-hunting and co-option of former political opponents. This sections argues that, contrary to the political affiliation narrative or party politics argument usually deployed to explain intergovernmental fiscal relations in decentralisation processes in the developing world (Hibbs, 1992; Ahmad et al., 2005), the threat of political co-option and victimisation by the ruling party in Sierra Leone was positively utilised by opposition councils to not only increase their access to resources from the centre, but also to improve their management systems to fend off the risks of politically-motivated prosecution. Whereas the pro-ruling APC councils were enjoying the comfort of incumbency and absence of prosecutorial threats (made

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<sup>227</sup> Interview with the Mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

possible through the ruling party camaraderie in pro-government councils) the pro-opposition SLPPP councils (at least in Bo and Kenema) were working hard to cut waste and improve efficiency in their fiscal management, whilst running transparent administrations with active civic engagement design to not only provide local public services, but also to impress voters.

Political victimisation and co-option are not exclusive to the APC. Both the SLPP and the APC have, during their tenures in central governance, victimised and co-opted local politicians from each other's councils. In 2006, for instance, Makeni City Council was mired in a corruption scandal over a 60 million Leones rice farm project which the council purported to have cultivated in a village close to the city but did nothing tangible to reflect the amount of money spent.<sup>228</sup> Following this scandal, the APC demanded the resignation of both the mayor and his deputy. Although the deputy resigned, the mayor refused, banking on the support of then Vice President Solomon Berewa of the SLPP. The political standoff led to the dismissal of Mayor Mansaray from the APC and further calls for his dismissal as mayor, as he was no longer a member of the party on whose ticket he was elected. For the SLPP, backing the beleaguered mayor was a strategic political move to destabilise an opposition council and possibly win some votes from the mayor's political allies.<sup>229</sup> The political battle shifted when the city's residents enlisted the support of small scale commercial traders and local business people to withhold payment of market dues – a decision with huge financial implications for the council's resource mobilisation drive. Although the mayor eventually resigned, he did so only after a city-wide public demonstration which led to a clash between the police (allegedly acting on the instructions of the SLPP-led government) and protesters (believed to be mostly APC sympathisers).<sup>230</sup>

Following the 2007 national electoral victory of the APC on the back of an anti-corruption commitment, the APC-led government amended the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Act of 2000, ceding powers to the Commission to investigate, charge and prosecute alleged corruption cases without reference to the office of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice (Anti-Corruption Act, 2008). While this was generally seen as a positive move in the fight against corruption, the SLPP interpreted it within the context of a party politics argument (Hibbs, 1992) as a political ploy to clamp

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<sup>228</sup> Interview with a human rights activist, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>229</sup> Interview with the regional chairman of the APC party, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>230</sup> Interview with a human rights activist, Makeni City (July, 2015).

down on opposition politicians. Therefore, SLPP councils ‘became extraordinarily vigilant in their dealings with public funds to avoid the political trap of the ACC, cutting waste and generating resources locally, [thus] contributing significantly to the excellent CLoGPAS rankings of SLPP-controlled councils’.<sup>231</sup>

Across opposition-controlled councils, there were orchestrated government attempts to undercut planned development programmes or scare opposition leaders by threatening them with corruption-related prosecution, and use some core staff to undermine elected local leaders. In most occasions, the intent was not really to prosecute, but rather to destabilise and co-opt opponents.<sup>232</sup> In 2007, for instance, Bo City Council had proposed the funding of a street light project as part of its Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF 2007-2009). Following the APC’s presidential victory that same year, the government decided not to fund the street light project on the basis that energy is not a devolved sector. However, the SLPP believed that the government’s decision was based on the perceived political capital the opposition would have gained, considering the demand for electricity among Sierra Leoneans.<sup>233</sup> It would appear the former mayor’s claim is a bit overstated, but the fact that the APC-led government later funded a street light project in major towns and cities – including Bo – close to the 2012 election, lends credence to the opposition’s claim.<sup>234</sup>

In 2015, the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee (PAC) refused to approve Kenema City Council’s annual budgetary allocation for over six months, citing lack of accountability for the previous year’s allocation. But the mayor of Kenema later went on radio and television to publicly accuse the PAC of demanding a bribe of 25,000,000 Leones (about USD 5,000) before it would approve the council’s allocation (Concord Times Newspaper, 22 May, 2015). Whilst such bribery allegations are not necessarily new, what was new in Sierra Leone’s fiscal decentralisation was parliament’s decision to withhold funding for a local council for over six months. Although the funds were later released, critics believed that Kenema was simply being punished for its ‘uncompromising support for the SLPP, as such financial reporting irregularities are not unique to Kenema in the country’s fiscal decentralisation and accountability framework.’<sup>235</sup> After a lengthy investigation of the bribery allegations, the corruption

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<sup>231</sup> Interview with a long-term councillor of Kenema City Council, Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>232</sup> Interview with the regional coordinator - south, Office of the Ombudsman, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>233</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>234</sup> See Ministry of Energy website: [http://www.energy.gov.sl/Solar\\_Street\\_Light\\_Project.html](http://www.energy.gov.sl/Solar_Street_Light_Project.html)

<sup>235</sup> Interview with a national executive member of the SLPP, Kenema City (June, 2015).

watchdog's investigation exonerated MPs from the mayor's bribery allegations, concluding that Mayor Kelfala could not adduce evidence to substantiate his claims and asked that he apologise to MPs (Awoko Newspaper, 25 November, 2015). Whether this was a face-saving attempt to restore parliamentary dignity or otherwise, insider sources suggest that the mayor's apology was actually followed by him paying the bribe he had gone public about.<sup>236</sup>

Political victimisation may appear a negative political tool, but it is interesting to examine how opposition councils have used it in a positive way to improve their internal fiscal management systems and their financial bargaining power with the central government. As a long-serving CA noted:

I know how the fear of prosecution by the government has propelled opposition councils to tighten up their belts. When I was in Tonkolili district council [a pro-government council], the chairman carried with him signed council cheques and withdrew money at will...After all, he is a strong APC man. Besides, successive audit reports from 2010 to 2013 have all found the accounting books of Makeni City and Port Loko District Councils wanting.... But parliament has never withheld funding to these councils for even a month...but Kenema survived for over six months, entirely from enhanced local revenue mobilization and efficiency savings.<sup>237</sup>

Such financial mismanagement, as demonstrated by the Tonkolili scenario, should not be hastily dismissed as gross managerial incompetence, but seen within the context of a well-organised devolution of corruption (Kandeh, 2012) in which local party agents carry out the corruption [award of contracts with bribes and sometime just the stealing of council resources] for their political godfathers (Olarinmoye, 2008). It should also be noted that every national audit report since 2009 has highlighted organised mismanagement of public funds across local councils and central government MDAs, with repeated management reform recommendations which have been largely ignored.

However, beyond the argument for strong local revenue mobilisation to promote fiscal autonomy for local councils (Bird, 2010; Martinez-Vázquez and Smoke, 2010; Jibao and Prichard, 2013), the fear of prosecution and the unpredictability of central government funding among opposition councils generated a sense of commitment to prudent public financial management. The very thought that a crime dismissed as trivial in a pro-government council would lead to prosecution in an opposition-controlled one kept

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<sup>236</sup> Comments by journalist who covers parliamentary proceedings for a local newspaper; Freetown (April, 2016).

<sup>237</sup> Interview with a senior local council staff member, Kenema City (June, 2015)

opposition councils not only worried, but also propelled a genuine willingness to perform, unlike in government controlled councils. In Makeni City Council, for instance, following a corruption scandal involving Mayor Mansaray in 2006, his successor instituted an inquiry which revealed substantial evidence linking the former mayor with massive corruption. Although the evidence was submitted to the police for investigation, neither the police nor the ACC probed the matter further (Conteh, 2014). In Bo City Council, on the other hand, Mayor Tucker reported being investigated for suspected mismanagement of public funds, rather than commended for a corruption allegation in which he was the whistle-blower.<sup>238</sup>

On the flipside, however, the lack of fear from among councils of the ruling party propelled slogans such '*dis na we tem*' (this is our time) and 'we should protect each other', raising concerns about the corruption-facilitation role of decentralisation and the promotion of neopatrimonialism and party camaraderie, reminiscent of what Lindberg (2003) described as 'it's our time to chop' in African electoral local governance. In Port Loko, for instance, the council received over one billion Leones towards the upgrading of the township's water supply system, but it appeared the project was a failure:

The work done does not reflect the money spent and the taps are still dry...because the contract was awarded to a big APC politician. Although we [civil society] reported this matter to the ACC over two years ago, I am afraid this government has sacred cows.<sup>239</sup>

At the extreme end of this corruption syndicate, politicians in pro-government councils are unashamedly proud of the use of political scaremongering and prosecution threats to undo their opponents. The 'SLPP has victimised the APC on many fronts', remarked a local council chairperson, 'the APC is only applying the law, and if that means prosecuting opposition wrongdoers or withholding funds, so be it'.<sup>240</sup> However, it would be naïve to think that the ruling party has always used political victimisation as a tool for scoring political points. In fact, contrary to the political affiliation and party politics argument (Hibbs, 1992; Schmidt, 1996), co-option, rather than prosecution and/or exclusion, has been the main instrument – which has been smartly embraced by some opposition politicians to their advantage. In 2014, for instance, Pujehun District Council secured a 900 million Leones central government-funded project for repairs to a bridge (named after President Koroma) and culverts connecting the two sections of

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<sup>238</sup> Interview with the mayor of Bo City Council; Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>239</sup> Interview with civil society and human activist in Port Loko, Port Loko Town, June, 2006.

<sup>240</sup> Interview with a pro-ruling party local council chairman, Port Loko Town (June, 2015).

the township (New Citizen Newspaper, 14 June 2015). In a statement to the parliamentary oversight committee on infrastructure, Pujehun District Council Chairman, Saddiq Sillah, boasted: ‘Although I am SLPP, I have succeeded in bringing on board all development stakeholders to help us develop our district...one must put aside party politics so as to succeed in developing his community’ (New Citizen Newspaper, 14 June 2015). This co-optive approach of government was aimed at vote-gathering beyond traditional ethno-political divisions, through the distribution of private goods to target opposition voters. Lundgren et al. (2013:6) define private goods as ‘excludable’ goods targeted at influential individuals, ‘enabling recipients of such goods to keep them for themselves or distribute them among others who can be helpful in building electoral support’.

In what was seen by opposition supporters as a political sell-out, but as a show of bipartisan cooperation, Saddiq Sillah, together with influential members of the SLPP from the south-eastern regions, paid a courtesy call at the State House to endorse the appointment of Victor Foh as the country’s new vice president following the controversial sacking of former Vice President Samuel Sam Samuna. After the endorsement, President Koroma, alongside Chairmen Saddiq Sillah of Pujehun and Alex Bonapha of Kailahun, flew on board a presidential helicopter to bid farewell to HMS Argus, a British ship which had been stationed off Freetown as part of the UK’s military support to fight the Ebola virus (New Citizen Newspaper, 14 June, 2015). Long before this, the APC had co-opted the former chairman of the Kailahun District Council, Tom Nyuma, and built a working relationship with Mayor Sannoh of Bo City Council, to support the APC’s south-eastern project of vote mobilisation in so-called SLPP strongholds. For such opposition-luring to succeed, the ruling party had to positively reciprocate with financial largesse in the form of local development projects to make the ruling party attractive to voters and justify the decision of their local leaders to associate with their political foes.<sup>241</sup>

Therefore, the relationship between opposing parties in Sierra Leone should not be misunderstood as mutually exclusive. As Keen (2002, 2005) argued, the line between two enemies in a conflict is in a constant state of flux. Just as government soldiers and rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) – who were meant to be adversaries – colluded in their exploitation of civilians, leading to expressions such as ‘*sell game*’ and

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<sup>241</sup> Interview with a civil society activist, Freetown (May, 2015).

*Sobel*, so too do politicians across the political divide in Sierra Leone sometimes collaborate in their common interest. A serving chief administrator neatly summarised this corrupt political enterprise:

On average, each local council loses about 100 million Leones each year as bribes to parliamentary oversight committees. Over ten parliamentary committees visit local councils each year...and a council spends a minimum of 10 million Leones for each committee. The committees are made of up APC and SLPP MPs...They work together as comrades and share the loot together, you would not know who is SLPP and who is APC...such that if they are in an SLPP council, the head of delegation will be an APC MP and vice versa. In this way, an SLPP council will not blame the SLPP MP for extortion...the blame will be shifted to the opposite party. It's a well-organised syndicate.<sup>242</sup>

The sheer scale of corruption within the political and bureaucratic classes in governance suggests that, in many instances, decision-making motivations go well beyond simplistic narratives of political party affiliation. The personal relationship between Mayor Wusu Sannoh of Bo and Minister Duada Kamara, for instance, suggest that while they are divided by their political differences, their personal friendship often overrides their political differences – partly explaining why Bo City Council benefitted from state resources during the tenure of the two politicians.<sup>243</sup>

#### **6.4 Political Opposition and Political Revival**

One might wonder how being an opposition council could incentivise good performance in public service delivery in a polarised local government landscape (Hibbs, 1992; Schmidt, 1996; Ahmad et al., 2005). This section argues that the quest to win national elections – following the SLPP's 2007 presidential and parliamentary electoral defeat – promoted a spirit of commitment to effective service delivery and efficient resource management at the local level as a form of party profiling to win an electoral advantage. In pro-ruling party councils, however, the incumbency syndrome was a big service delivery and management performance disincentive. Therefore, opposition councils are not necessarily weakened if and when their parties lose national governance because the incentives for political actors are not monolithic; changes in political fortunes promote different motivations for different political actors.

The SLPP's 2007 electoral defeat was momentous, not only for the party, but for the country's emerging post-war democratic reform process (Zack-Williams and Gbla,

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<sup>242</sup> Interview with a serving CA in one of the local councils, Freetown, (July, 2015).

<sup>243</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

2008). By the beginning of 2008, SLPP councils which had been – at the inception of decentralisation in 2004 – ruling party councils, suddenly became opposition councils. Political devastation, disorientation and disorganisation subsequently spread from the SLPP’s national headquarters in Freetown to its local council entities across the country. As a former SLPP member of parliament explained, ‘we needed to pull ourselves together’, and begin the process of soul-searching, after a brutal electoral defeat’.<sup>244</sup> But for some SLPP members involved in local governance, the job was not about soul-searching, but rather the strategic repositioning of the party through effective and efficient local public service delivery in local councils under the party’s control. Their object was to send a clear political message, ‘the SLPP can be trusted again to govern’, and would deliver nationally, as it was locally, if re-elected.<sup>245</sup>

Considering the centrality of Bo in the politics of the SLPP and the persona of Mayor Sannoh, party stalwarts were convinced that Bo City Council (and gradually bringing in Kenema City Council) could be the rallying point, by show-casing the service delivery strides, exemplary political will and stability created by Mayor Sannoh’s leadership. ‘For me’, noted Mayor Sannoh, ‘as much as I had a public service delivery mandate from the residents of Bo, I delivered on my mandate with a bigger agenda of repositioning the SLPP for national governance’.<sup>246</sup>

For Mayor Sannoh, a major component of the SLPP’s rebranding was to demonstrate genuine political commitment to public service delivery at the local level; a commitment that was seen to be incorruptible and all embracing – fundamental features absent in the SLPP government of 1996-2007, and a major factor why the party lost the 2007 elections (Kandeh, 2008; Zack-Williams and Gbla, 2008). Therefore, seeking forgiveness from the public should be preceded by the party atoning for its past wrongs through good public service delivery in localities under its control:

During the party’s 60th anniversary [year], which coincided with Sierra Leone’s 50th independence anniversary on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2011, I decided to construct a statue of the SLPP founding father and Sierra Leone’s first Prime Minister – Sir Milton Margai – at the forecourt of the Bo City Hall. We then agreed to organise a big 60th anniversary commemoration ceremony and statue dedication...to run parallel with the government’s extravagant 50th independence anniversary celebrations. Since the party was out of power, the dedication of Sir Milton’s statue was designed to

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<sup>244</sup> Interview with a former member of parliament for the SLPP in the southern region, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>245</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>246</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

bring party members together in a solemn but joyous gathering, to build momentum ahead of the 2012 elections.<sup>247</sup>

While the SLPP was using Bo and, partly, Kenema to mobilise locally for a national political project, the APC was enjoying its power renaissance after 15 years of political oblivion following its military overthrow in 1992 (Zack-Williams and Riley, 1993). Makeni and Port Loko are adjacent northern districts and form the core of the support base of the APC. With senior government ministers and top government bureaucrats from the two local council areas, council authorities had little or no political canvassing to do, and since the APC had just won the presidential elections, the focus of the party and its supporters was how to consolidate their grip on power and ‘teach the SLPP a good lesson’.<sup>248</sup>

After eleven years of SLPP rule (1996-2007) – with a number of post-conflict governance institutions created and staffed under the party’s watchful eye – the public bureaucracy was undoubtedly dominated by SLPP sympathisers when the APC came to power in September, 2007. The APC was therefore determined to rid the public sector of SLPP sympathisers and replace them with pro-APC loyalists and the diaspora elites who had partly funded the APC’s electoral victory (International Crisis Group, 2008). If any services were to be delivered in APC-controlled local council areas, it was thought to be the responsibility of the central government. In fact, the second batch of APC councillors elected in 2008 were largely ‘handpicked’ party loyalists rewarded for their support during the 2007 electoral campaign, but lacked the ‘competence and gravitas required to drive change’ and development in their localities.<sup>249</sup> The outcome was obvious: while SLPP councils were rebranding their party for national electability, APC councils were busy enjoying their new found political power and its accompanying resources amidst the comfort of incumbency with no true local level development and service delivery initiatives. In Makeni for instance, Mayor Moses Sesay was described by residents as ‘pompous, corrupt and disrespectful’.<sup>250</sup> In Port Loko, Chairman Fofanah was almost always out of the district, as he doubled as president of the Local Councils

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<sup>247</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>248</sup> Interview with a locally based civil society activist, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>249</sup> Interview with a locally-based civil society activist, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>250</sup> Interview with a locally-based civil society activist, Makeni City (July, 2015).

Association – Sierra Leone (LOCASL), essentially abdicating his functions to non-elected council employees.<sup>251</sup>

The change of political parties in national governance generated a diverse set of motivations for opposition and governing party councils. For the APC, its new-found power disorientated the party, pushing it away from local development priorities following its long absence from national governance. Conversely, rather than resorting to traditional political bickering or political blame-gaming, the SLPP embraced some elements of political co-option, and used the windfall from the central government to strategically reposition the party for a future national electoral victory.

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter used context-specific socio-economic and political considerations that linked the various intersections between actors, motivations and the complex societal networks of patron-client and kinship relations in the politics of democratic decentralisation to provide a rich explanation for the management performance and service delivery variations among local councils in Sierra Leone. It does so by progressively developing a network of varying levels of power dynamics, relationships and motivations of decentralisation actors from Freetown to the towns and villages across the study areas. The analysis and its supporting evidence suggest that the ‘political party affiliation’ argument lacks robustness. Decentralisation actors have multiple levels of interaction and motivation, and where their common interests converge, they always cooperate. The example of the good relationship between Mayor Sannoh and Minister Dauada Kamara points to the complexity of relationships in decentralisation politics; these may straddle the traditional political party loyalty borders, into the territories of tribal, regional, family and collegial connections. In a post-war donor-dependent country like Sierra Leone, the role of resources in public service delivery cannot be overstated. However, the neoliberal institutionalism prescription of the political party affiliation alone – without the required political will, political tact and motivation to drive change – can be a recipe for corruption and underperformance.

What the political party affiliation argument critically fails to account for is how the threat of manipulation from the ruling party can be positively embraced by opposition

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<sup>251</sup> Chairman Fofanah leads a movement within the APC in Port Loko known as the ‘Correct Camp’ and is notorious for long periods of absence from his local council areas, but is highly connected and influential within the APC hierarchy, ensuring that the district always gets huge central government transfers.

councils with different political motivations. While incumbency became a disincentive to service delivery in Makeni and Port Loko, in Bo and Kenema the fear of political intimidation and prosecution seemed to have provided a big incentive to perform, such that it may appear appropriate to recommend a political governance formula for improved local public service delivery in Sierra Leone in which one political party controls the central government and other is in charge of local councils. Of course, this might look a little too simplistic and presumptive, considering that not all opposition councils are doing as well as Bo and Kenema. But the evidence from these two councils suggests that the motivation of gaining national political control was a major incentive for the management performance and service delivery output in Bo and Kenema City Councils.

The complexity of socio-political relations in Sierra Leone's decentralisation and political topography (Workman, 2011; Kandeh, 2013) suggests that the tactics of vote aggregation in the so-called opposition strongholds have not always been one of intimidation and deprivation. In many situations, it has been a process of active co-option which the opposition has used to serve personal and communal interests. To understand the processes and corollary of resources accumulation and distribution, and management performance and service delivery variations, requires a significant departure from reductionist meta-narratives and technocratic solutions to complex socio-political phenomena.

## Chapter Seven

### **Decentralised Service Delivery: Social Cohesion Implications in A Post-War Context**

#### **7.0 Introduction**

Thus far, the thesis has analysed Sierra Leone's post-war governance reform context and decentralisation trajectory, including its key actors and their competing incentives and motivations. It has also discussed the institutional structure of decentralisation and used data on intergovernmental fiscal transfers and councils' management performance ranking and service delivery output to problematise and critique the incomplete story of the political affiliation argument and its donor-led neoliberal institutional compliance preference in Sierra Leone's decentralisation project. It has also analysed the processes and progress of service delivery, and proffered context-specific alternative explanations for the service delivery and management performance variations among the four case-study councils outside the political affiliation argument.

In this chapter, the thesis builds on the foundational and analytical progress in the previous chapters to assess some of the implications of Sierra Leone's decentralisation model on social cohesion in a post-war context where ethnic identity is not only one of the most important political rallying points, but also a major determinant of peoples' socio-political groupings and voting preferences (Casey, 2012). The chapter aims to answer sub-research question three – whether decentralisation supports or hinders long-term processes of social relations and cohesion in post-war Sierra Leone. The chapter is guided by an assumption that in order to understand how decentralisation affects the long-term local process of social cohesion in a post-war context such as Sierra Leone's, it is important to first of all understand how social capital functions and how its processes of social action are mobilised and deployed in the politics of decentralisation (Fine and Lapavitsas, 2004). Social capital – the networks and norms of trust and cooperation within society (Soroka et al., 2007:566) – in post-war traditional societies like Sierra Leone, the chapter argues, constitute the critical building blocks for social cohesion, and that the manner in which social capital is embedded in a holistic decentralisation package contributes significantly to enhancing or disrupting social agents and networks of social cohesion.

Coleman (1990:302, in Fine and Lapavitsas, 2004:19) defines social capital as 'social-structural resources, [which are] inherent to society and operate as capital for the

individual in the sense that they can facilitate individual rational action'. Therefore, social capital is perceived as a public good that influences individual and group action through the internalisation of social norms such as trust and reliability. Coleman (1990) suggests that a good stock of social capital is crucial for society to develop trust, confidence and cooperation, whilst Putnam (1993:172, in Fine and Lapavistas, 2004:20) on the other hand, suggests that a society requires 'communal reciprocity' for both the formation and strengthening of social capital.

In line with Putman's (1993) argument, this chapter analyses social capital and its relations to social cohesion in Sierra Leone's decentralisation process based on a) the degree of long-term inter and intra-ethnic group participation and collaboration with local councils in multi-ethnic social groupings, and b) the level of trust between and among people of different ethno-political groupings. The chapter argues that the promise of decentralisation as a tool for rebuilding broken bonds, and as a mobilisation force for the marginalised in Sierra Leone to own and control their destinies through the enhancement of social cohesion, has failed to unite people for the common good. And, as the thesis discussed in section 2.2, social capital can bring people together for both positive and negative outcomes, and in societies (such as Sierra Leone) governed by ethnic-based patron-client politics (Kandeh, 1992), existing norms of social capital can easily become the forces of social violence and instability, rather than the bankrupt patron-client political approach of politicians (Jensen, 2010). The chapter – in line with the thesis's overall argument – argues that the emphasis on neoliberal institutionalism in Sierra Leone's decentralisation project failed to integrate core socio-structural resources such as chieftaincy, traditional societies, labour gangs and ethnic kinship into a holistic programme of decentralisation that would promote the positive, rather than the negative side effects of social capital – the core basis for social cohesion. Local institutions of conflict prevention and mitigation, such as traditional justice, remain largely outside the decentralisation institutional landscape (Boone, 2003; Jensen, 2010; Tandros, 2013).

The organic nature of village-level communities, the chapter further suggests, provides for high levels of generalised reciprocity, with people demonstrating strong associational bonds leading to collective action. However, at the town and city level, especially in heterogeneous settlements – such as Bo and Kenema – with high rates of migration, decentralisation can prove to be highly antithetical to social cohesion relative to more homogenous settlements – such as Makeni and Port Loko – due to the political and

highly technocratic nature of decentralisation and limited levels of general reciprocity (Putman, 1993).

This chapter is organised in six interrelated sections. Following this introduction, section two analyses the promise of decentralisation, especially its social cohesion instrumentalisation in post-war societies, and how Sierra Leone – after a decade of war – fits into such narratives. In section three, the thesis compares the objectifying role of decentralisation against its actual social cohesion provisions. The section questions the extent to which the social cohesion promise of decentralisation was politicised and instrumentalised by different actors in the decentralisation process. Sections four and five discuss how and why the socio-structural resources inherent in social capital (Coleman, 1990) are or are not integrated into a holistic local governance and decentralisation reform at the local level in Sierra Leone. Section four specifically discusses decentralisation and social cohesion in rural communities – in particular, the competing and sometimes acrimonious relationships among chiefs, MPs and councillors. Section five focuses on the ethnic politicisation of decentralisation in towns and cities, questioning why rural communities appear to have higher levels of ‘generalized reciprocity’ than towns and cities, and how this affects post-war social cohesion in Sierra Leone (Putman, 1993:173). The final section summarises the key evidence in support of the chapter’s main arguments, whilst pinpointing the main conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis.

### **7.1 Decentralisation: The Post-War Social Cohesion Argument**

The non-religious and non-ethnic character of Sierra Leone’s civil war has been widely acknowledged (Keen, 2005; Glennerster et al., 2010; Casey, 2012). This section argues that the fact that Sierra Leone’s civil war was not driven by extreme inter-ethnic violence such as in the 1994 Rwandan genocide (Tilburg, 2008) does not absolve it from ethnic-related violence and its negative impact on social cohesion. This is because warring factions such as the Civil Defence Force (CDF) – an umbrella term for a number of ethnic-based civil militias such as the Tamaboro of the Kurankor ethnic group, the Gbethis and Kapras of the Temne tribe, and the Kamajors of the Mende ethnic group (Hoffman, 2007) – have been found guilty by the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone of war crimes and crimes against humanity including murder,

pillage and forceful recruitment in rural communities in Sierra Leone in which ethnic identity was a major motivation (Keen, 2009).<sup>252</sup>

The section further argues that the role of decentralisation in promoting post-war social cohesion in Sierra Leone was politicised and romanticised – by both the country’s political elites and her external donor partners – to solicit local support for governance reform from a war-weary nation. The election of the SLPP in 1996 – with its strong roots in the Mende-dominated south-eastern regions of Sierra Leone (Kandeh, 2012) – the Kamajors became the de facto national army (Hoffman, 2007) and when Chief Sam Hinga Norman, a Mende chief and senior Kamajor operative, was appointed deputy defence minister in the SLPP government of 1996-2002, Kamajor atrocities largely went unpunished, and sometimes even had the tacit approval of the central government:

We were constantly harassed by the Kamajors and accused of being rebel collaborators, simply because we are Temnes. My husband was beaten and stripped naked on his return from the popular diamond mining town of Tonga Fields... The Kamajors had accused him of supplying cigarettes and alcohol to the rebels. If the Kamajors accused you of a crime, not even the army could save you... They were above the law.<sup>253</sup>

Beyond the oversimplification of the non-ethnic nature of Sierra Leone’s war that often portrays members of the RUF as irrational and senseless bandits (Keen, 2005), Keen (2002:5-6) has reminded us of the grievance-oriented functions of war in Sierra Leone, with grotesque violence designed to command respect by young men dissatisfied with their pre-war lack of opportunities in their communities and the draconian nature of rural gerontocracy at the country side. The grotesque violence and humiliation meted out to local notables – such as chiefs – was designed to not only humiliate their victims, but to also earn respect from the local ‘big men’ who they considered part of the rural gerontocracy that had robbed them of their prosperity (Keen, 2002). With paramount chiefs targeted and killed, neighbours’ homes burnt, women raped, property looted, cultural deities desecrated and families torn apart, significant collateral damage was inflicted on the country’s social capital that led to the breakdown of trust – the fabric of a country’s social cohesion (Coleman, 1990; Soroka et al., 2007; Harriss, 2013). As Wehr and Lederach (1991:87) argue, a fundamental component of collective conflict resolution and the strengthening of social cohesion in protracted conflicts is ‘trust’; trust is needed to create the special space to facilitate and acknowledge the wrongs of the

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<sup>252</sup> See the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone (RSCSL) website <http://www.rscsl.org/CDF.html>

<sup>253</sup> Interview with a Temne businesswoman in the Bo No. 2 Area, Bo City (May, 2015).

past, reframing the present and envisioning the future , as the more people have in common, ‘the more easily will their totality involved in every single relation’, so ‘their trust relationship permits them to resolve the conflict together’ (Wehr and Lederach 1991:87).

Although the unitary nature of the state was not contested during the war, the government had long envisioned decentralisation as a vehicle for post-war peace building and reconciliation among the country’s fractured communities (Government of Sierra Leone, 2002; 2005:81):

The Government has...adopted decentralisation as a key strategy for...consolidating peace and reducing poverty. This strategic decision is based on the recognition that a major contributing factor to the war was the antagonism between a large section of the population, who were marginalised from the political process and deprived of social services and economic development opportunities.

Outside the government’s peace-building role of decentralisation, there was also a belief that the degree of poverty and levels of deprivation in rural communities, especially after the war, required not only external support, but a nationwide citizens’ mobilisation to act in the collective good (Government of Sierra Leone, 2005). Such collective action (in the government’s opinion), can only be achieved through democratic decentralisation in which local public services are planned and delivered locally by people who elect their local leaders, ‘pay taxes, [and] determine and own their development destiny’.<sup>254</sup> Such an unrealistic expectation of local people romanticises the power of the community, mostly mobilised through organised local institutions to unleash the peoples’ potentials (Williams, 2004).

However, the Government of Sierra Leone did not need to promote decentralisation either as a peace bargaining chip with the fighting forces, or to ensure peaceful co-existence between and among former adversaries (Fanthorpe et al., 2011) as the sanctity of the state was unchallenged, and the war was not overtly conducted on the ethnic lines common in secessionist movements such as the RENAMO and FRELIMO factions in Mozambique (Sitoe and Hanguana, 2005; cf. Fanthorpe et al., 2011:42). This is not to ignore the fact that some former fighters were afraid of returning to their villages in fear of reprisal attacks in relation to some of their (RUF) targeted killings and looting during the war (Ginifer, 2003). Because decentralisation presupposes some form

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<sup>254</sup> Interview with a former government minister in the 2002-2007 SLPP government, Freetown (August, 2014).

of power transfer from the centre to the periphery, it is difficult to imagine that national politicians were willing to decentralise only on the basis of altruistic motivations of post-war social cohesion without some other unexplained motives (Boone, 2003). Therefore, the government's peace building and social cohesion rhetoric over decentralisation is one that requires careful analysis. Perhaps an important first step is to assess rhetoric versus reality in the government's decentralisation commitment, and to ask if and why there are variations between the government's professed commitment to social cohesion and the main social cohesion provisions of the Local Government Act (LGA).

## **7.2 Rhetoric versus Reality: The LGA's Social Cohesion Provisions**

The Government of Sierra Leone's (2002) post-war governance and economic development agenda articulated a correlation between decentralisation and social cohesion. But beyond the rhetoric of peace building, the LGA had few tangible social cohesion provisions. For instance, section 94(1) provides for the creation of ward development committees (WDCs) with equal gender representation, and hopefully, equal participation in the planning, implementation and oversight of development projects. The participatory functions of the WDCs were carved out to not only promote local ownership of development programming, they were also 'intended to bring people of diverse political and ethnic backgrounds together', under the umbrella of the 'common good' and strengthening community bonds.<sup>255</sup> In this context, the WDCs were seen as channels for unleashing the much debated and critiqued concept of community social capital (Fine, 2001; Harris, 2001; Fine and Lapavistas, 2004), defined by Collier (2002:99-100) as the 'trust generated by participating in informal or formal groupings of people into networks, clubs, and societies' to promote common interest and cooperation and, in the process, reducing the probability of inter-ethnic divisions and conflict. However, the extent of intergroup networking, trust building and bonding envisaged in the formation of the ward committees in Sierra Leone's decentralisation is largely dependent on the unrestricted spaces provided by both central and local government, and deliberate attempt(s) at inter-ethnic and social group involvement (Smith, 2000; Snyder, 2000).

We were all very active at the beginning...we attended meetings and cooperated very well in several ward activities and information sharing. But later, our councillor started holding separate meetings

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<sup>255</sup> Interview with director of the Decentralisation Secretariat, Freetown (August, 2014).

with other members, excluding some of us seen as non-Temnes and non-APC. So, plenty of us decided to stay back.<sup>256</sup>

The challenges of political interference and marginalisation of those considered opposed to the political and ethnic status quo in the activities of the ward committees speaks volumes about the quixotic role of decentralisation in promoting social cohesion in contexts where ethno-political loyalties have overcome genuine attempts at community integration and bonding. In Sierra Leone, as in many other developing countries, at every level of governance there are gatekeepers in well-orchestrated systems designed to capture and divert public resources for personal gain. Such manipulation cuts across traditional geo-ethnic boundaries, operating outside the traditional class or ethnic divisions (Chazan, 1992; Khan, 2006), and mostly along the corridors of those with access to state power and resources. This culture of power and resource capture creates two dynamic contractions in the decentralisation process. At the first level, bureaucratic reluctance and the lack of political will to fully decentralise and create meaningful autonomous sources of revenue mobilisation reduces the ability of councils to generate resources locally and deliver services. At the second level, councils have become less consultative with local people. Councillors have increasingly usurped the only channel (the ward development committees) of local participation in the planning and delivery of local services, while local council employees actively operate corruption cliques in the management of resources at the local level. In effect, local people have become what Parker (2013) described as the ‘squeezed middle’; from above by politicians and bureaucrats and at the local level, by councillors and local council employees.

Across all local council entities, expressions such as ‘the great three’ and the ‘holy trinity’ – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – reverberated, pointing towards the existence of corruption cliques working against the poor.<sup>257</sup> The biblical connotations used to disguise the true identities of members of these cliques referred to the three most powerful decision-makers at the council level. In this case, ‘God the Father’ refers to the mayor or chairperson, ‘God the Son’ is the chief administrator (CA) and ‘God the Holy Spirit’ is the finance officer: the three signatories to council accounts who also double as the political (mayor or chairman), administrative (the CA) and finance heads (finance officer) of the local councils. The ‘Holy Trinity’,

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<sup>256</sup> Interview with a former WDC member in Lokomasama Chiefdom, Port Loko District (June, 2015).

<sup>257</sup> These were expressions used constantly by local staff in interviews and hang-about during fieldwork.

and their often co-opted loyalists, determine council activities, and how and what can be funded.

Here, the Holy Trinity has co-opted the DPO [development and planning officer] into the clique. So we now call the DPO ‘God the Uncle’. He is even more powerful and strategic, as he is not a signatory to the council accounts, so he has nothing to be afraid of.<sup>258</sup>

To survive as an employee outside this clique, you needed to be in the good books of the ‘Holy Trinity’, otherwise you would ‘end up in hell’.<sup>259</sup> These corruption cliques have led to the emergence of a group of local notables, who are not only popular, but also live far beyond their means relative to their official wages. They drive cars that cost, on average, over \$10,000 – an amount that would pay the average salary of a local council core staff member for no less than five years.<sup>260</sup> In clubs, bars and social events across the study areas, these local elites of council employees – including their local partners and collaborators such as contractors and bank managers – are addressed by acronyms linked to their official titles such as: CAs, DCAs, DPOs, FOs and POs, and are well-respected and demonstrate a symbol of local power and affluence.

These cliques of wealthy and powerful local council employees do not go unnoticed. Members of the public are critical about their increasing affluence and their sources of income in a context of growing local poverty and councils’ inability to provide local public services. As a civil society activist noted, tension is growing and the public is reacting in an unfriendly manner. Social inequality and the ‘growing gap between the rich and the poor has led to declining levels of social cohesion and trust, or disinvestment in social capital’ which promote a sense of disenchantment among citizens whilst limiting access to public services, norms of reciprocity, communal trust and cooperation (Kawachi et al., 1997:1491; Muntaner and Lynch, 1999; Wilkinson, 1997, 1999; Reitz and Banerjee, 2007). Residents of Kenema City, for instance, have demanded the transfer (since local council authorities cannot on their own sack local council core staff managed by the local government service commission) of the chief administrator and finance officer whom they labelled as too corrupt. Similar incidents have occurred in Makeni, where there was a physical confrontation between councillors,

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<sup>258</sup> Interview with a local council core staff member of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>259</sup> Interview with a local council core staff member of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>260</sup> The average salary for local council core staff is about 700,000 (about \$155) Leones per month.

civil society activists and some local council core staff members.<sup>261</sup> All of these produce local tension, disquiet and the building blocks for conflict.

Beyond these local tensions, such contradictions also belie the promise of the allocative efficiency and utility function of decentralisation (Crook, 2003; Ekpo, 2008). In Port Loko District Council, for instance, the council secured central government funding worth over one billion Leones towards the construction of a stadium and sports complex, despite residents' clear preference for market stalls and the provision of seed rice and fertilisers for farmers.<sup>262</sup> In Kenema, on the other hand, the city council proposed to construct a modest 2,000 seat capacity stadium and acquire new cemetery grounds during the 2016 financial year.<sup>263</sup> While the Kenema City Council projects were largely perceived as community-felt needs (Kenema has no stadium and the only city cemetery has reached its burial limit), in Port Loko, there was a clear case of allocative inefficiency and decisions taken without regard to local priorities. However, expensive construction projects remain popular with local councils in Sierra Leone, due to the easy loot they provide via dubious procurement procedures (Appolloni and Nshombo, 2013).<sup>264</sup>

At the community level however, people have developed strong support networks, different from those in town and cities. Across the four case-study councils, people at the village level are unleashing immense communal creativity. In village after village, rural people are not waiting for their local council to support their schools, maintain their footpaths or provide safe drinking water; they are continuously challenging the so-called tragedy of the common man (Ghani and Lockhart, 2008) by taking their destinies into their own hands:

Our old school building was blown away by heavy winds three years ago. We reported this to the local council several times, [but] nothing was done. We became tired of waiting; we organised ourselves with other surrounding villages. Young men volunteered labour and other local materials; we, the women gave rice and money...One of our sons in Freetown donated the roofing zinc. We did that for our children's futures.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Interview with a civil society activist in the eastern region, Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>262</sup> Minutes of a consultative meeting between residents of Port Loko Town and the Port Loko District Council on the construction of mini-stadium in Port Loko Town (accessed 25/06/15).

<sup>263</sup> Interview with a former chief administrator of Kenema City Council, Freetown, (July, 2015).

<sup>264</sup> This was also a popularly held view among civil society and media institutions that came up frequently in interviews and focus group discussions.

<sup>265</sup> Interview with a female community leader in Masimera Chiefdom, Port Loko District (July, 2015).

Outside the cities of Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Port Loko Town, hundreds of village-level associations, farming cooperatives and labour gangs across traditional ethno-political dichotomies have, and are still, emerging, providing training grounds for local leaders, creative minds and ingenious ways of solving community problems. Apart from the remarkable feat (detailed above) achieved by the people of Masimera, rural people are actively involved in Community Teachers Associations and school management activities, promoting communal cooperation and generating resources for educational services and management outside the remits of the WDCs and the decentralisation framework. Such remarkable achievements demonstrate an important aspect of post-war social cohesion, one which Richards et al. (2004:iii) referred to as ‘village social capital–parent power’. In particular, women are increasingly involved in this local mobilisation, despite their truncated involvement in the activities of the ward committees.

In addition to the ward committees, the requirement of ‘ordinarily resident local tax payer’ of section 6(1b) of the LGA as a prerequisite for election as councillor, presupposes – at least for national politicians – a general call to participation in local governance, either to seek an elective position or to exercise one’s franchise.

The people elect their councillors from within their communities. These are locally resident people who have everyday bonds with local residents and understand their needs, and can prioritise them appropriately...not like Freetown-based politicians.<sup>266</sup>

There is huge presumption in the decentralisation system that the exercise of franchise in itself, is a demonstration of participation by local people, whose sense of community is expected to ‘prevail over power, opportunism, and zero-sum relationships’ (Boone, 2003:6). Such narrow analysis of the role of local communities in rural governance in Sierra Leone is centered on a presumptuous belief in local homogeneity without a thorough assessment of who is participating, who takes decisions and to what extent these so-called local representatives can be made accountable. Without clear answers to these questions, decentralisation in Sierra Leone is bound to produce what Boone (2003:6) referred to as contradictory outcomes to social cohesion:

With some hindsight, it is perhaps obvious that the ‘democratic decentralisation’ initiatives of the 1980s and 1990s were bound to produce uneven, contradictory and often disappointing results. In

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<sup>266</sup> Interview with the Deputy Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Freetown (September, 2014).

some cases, the reinvigoration of local despotisms, outbreaks of violence, or even outright decay of core-periphery linkages contradicted the most fundamental rationales for the state reform projects of the day. One problem was that the expectations of reform often were not premised upon concrete and nuanced analyses of the rural settings in which reform was being carried out.

Indeed, local despotism and violence have been invigorated in many local council entities in Sierra Leone, where the candidates chosen by political parties for elective local council positions come from outside the local council area they seek to represent. ‘Most of our councillors’, complained a local resident, ‘are not ordinarily resident in this community...yes, this is the home of their parents, but they are born in the city where they have lived all their lives. They don’t understand our way of life’.<sup>267</sup> Where the parties select locally-based candidates, they are mostly the already powerful – the land owners, prominent businessmen, and the sons and daughters of chieftaincy ruling clans.<sup>268</sup> In three out of the four local councils in this study, their political heads were not ordinarily resident in the localities they represent before they were elected. In Port Loko, Chairman Ahmid Fofonah was resident in Freetown and moved to a rented house in Port Loko after his election; Mayors Sunkari Kabba-Kamara of Makeni and Joseph S. Kaifala of Kenema are also Freetown residents. However, in Bo City Council, both Mayor Sannoh and his successor were and are ordinarily resident in Bo before and after their election. It is not clear why Bo is unique among the four councils in terms of the residency status of their local council leaders. One can only speculate that the cosmopolitan nature of Bo as the biggest city outside Freetown may be a plausible explanation. However, the issues about how local the local council representatives are points towards bigger challenges of local representation and accountability that belie the promise of proximity and local knowledge of decentralisation and local representation.

### **7.3 Local Power Struggles, Conflict Mitigation and Prevention: The Social Cohesion Nexus**

Chieftaincy and kinship as social institutions predate colonial rule and the introduction of western institutions of state governance in Sierra Leone. Conquest and the establishment of kingdoms via wars were major components of Sierra Leone’s kinship system and the formation and functioning of community action (Conteh, 2013). However, present day chieftaincy emerged from what used to be kingdoms ruled by victorious warlords known as kings. British colonisation and the subsequent

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<sup>267</sup> Interview with a youth activist in the village of Lokomasa, Port Loko District (July, 2015).

<sup>268</sup> See Chapters Three and Five for a comprehensive discussion on this.

introduction of ‘indirect rule’ in 1896 (Duffield, 2005) led to a Colony-Protectorate bifurcation and the erosion of the powers of the then kings, with their title downgraded to paramount chiefs (PCs) in exchange for the protection of their authority and resources (Richards et al., 2004).<sup>269</sup> Notwithstanding, the institution remains a powerful and respected socio-political tradition and the mainstay of traditional organisation in rural Sierra Leone (Conteh, 2013).

Following the brutal killing of a sizeable number of the country’s 114 paramount chiefs, the outbreak of the war itself has been linked with the undemocratic nature of chieftaincy in the countryside (Fanthorpe, 2005; Halon, 2005; Jackson, 2006). Within the international community therefore, there was scepticism about any potential role of chiefs in the new decentralisation dispensation. A UNDP-funded decentralisation reform consultation (2003), for instance, recommended the exclusion of chiefs in the decentralisation process, in favour of popular demands for a non-partisan local government system (Jackson, 2005). However, the SLPP government insisted on chieftaincy representation in local councils, partly due to the centrality of chiefs in vote aggregation and the fact that the chieftaincy institution remains highly popular among Sierra Leoneans (Gaima, 2009):

A local council shall consist of the number of...Paramount Chiefs in a locality as specified in Part II of the First Schedule, selected by the Paramount Chiefs in the locality to represent their interests. (LGA 2004:5)

Beyond what Giama (2009) referred to as tokenistic representation of chiefs in local councils, chiefs control significant public social capital such as culture, tradition and secret societies, and local means of production – taxation, land and natural resources – and local institutions of justice, conflict prevention and mitigation – all crucial elements of local service delivery and social cohesion (Jackson, 2011). This section argues that the role of chiefs as traditional rulers and the transformation of local power dynamics necessitated by the decentralisation project led to a clash of interests over power and resources between councils and chiefs, with negative implications for local social cohesion.

As representatives of their respective chiefdoms, paramount chiefs are expected to attend council meetings, contribute to their deliberations and receive sitting fees like any

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<sup>269</sup> Paramount chiefs should not be misconstrued with other lower ranking chiefs such as village and town chiefs. They exercise authority over sub-chiefs and act as state agents with reasonable executive and judicial powers (see Jackson, 2006).

other councillor. However, official council documents in the four case study councils indicate that despite the irregular attendance of chiefs in council meetings, chiefs receive the same sitting allowances as those received by regular councillors.<sup>270</sup> In their defence, chiefs have cited poor transportation and inadequate communication channels between them and councils as major challenges inhibiting their attendance in council sittings. ‘My old car is broken’; the ‘allowance paid cannot even buy my fuel, even in good times, so I always send a representative [to the council meetings]’, argued a paramount chief local council representative.<sup>271</sup> Outside these justifications, a cold war-like atmosphere between chiefs and councillors pervades and permeates rural Sierra Leone over the role of local councils and their relationship with chiefdom authorities:

I am not saying councils should not exist and provide services, but they have taken over our meagre sources of revenue...They now collect almost all the taxes we used to collect, and do so with disrespect to us as chiefs. Imagine. The only sacred possession we still hold is our land inherited from our forefathers...We will continue to protect it.<sup>272</sup>

Whilst the tension over power and the control of resources simmers at the local level, at the national level politicians appear, at least in public, to be painting a picture of collaborative relationships between chiefs and local councils. The ‘provisions of the LGA are simple and clear’, emphasised the deputy local government minister, ‘chiefs are members of councils, local councils set local tax rates and chiefdom authorities collect and share local revenue based on clear percentages; that is the spirit of team work at the local level, to promote development, local services and social cohesion’.<sup>273</sup> It would appear, as the deputy minister puts it, to be a straightforward relationship between chiefs and councils in local service delivery. However, the relationship between the two is not straightforward – especially in local tax collection and sharing. This lack of clarity on local resources mobilisation and distribution between councils and chiefs has service delivery implications at the local level, as some chiefdom authorities have refused to pay local tax precepts since 2012 in all the four councils in this study.<sup>274</sup> Such controversies and conflicts, in part, explain why the Council of Paramount Chiefs in Sierra Leone officially presented a petition to the President in 2010, requesting the supervision of

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<sup>270</sup> Records of council meetings and sitting fees for councillors suggest although some chiefs were marked as absent, they still received sitting fees.

<sup>271</sup> Interview with a Paramount Chief in Kenema District, Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>272</sup> Interview with a Paramount Chief in Kenema District, Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>273</sup> Interview with the Deputy Local Government Minister, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>274</sup> In all the statements of accounts reviewed by the researcher, local councils registered zero sources of income from local tax precepts in the last four years.

chiefdom finances be moved from the district councils to the colonial role of District Officer.<sup>275</sup>

However, since 2010, after the turbulent inception and transition phase of decentralisation (2004-2008), the two levels of local government (chiefdom and local councils) have been able to gradually adapt the provisions of the LGA to suit both their interests. Local councils have been largely confined to service delivery responsibilities, while chiefs continue to maintain control over land, traditional justice and kinship affairs (Jackson, 2011). The previously antagonistic relationship appears to have been transformed to fiefdom protectionism, managed without synergy with the overall local government system. But despite this seeming tranquillity, national politicians are igniting an already inflammable environment in their bid to win both pecuniary benefit and political capital (Jackson 2011). In the Koya chiefdom in the Port Loko district, for instance, an Italian company took over six years to negotiate a land deal for an ethanol production project with the local stakeholders in the chiefdom:

We paid a '*bora*' [literally meaning a shake hand – but used as a form of bribe]<sup>276</sup> to the chief to facilitate consultation with the land-owning families. But we also have to seek approval from the Port Loko District Council... Unfortunately, the council's relationship with the chief wasn't good. So the whole exercise got stalled. We later met with the local MP who had persuaded some land-owning families not to cooperate with the chief, because the chief did not support his MP election campaign. We had to pay a bribe again to the MP. At every stage from 2008 to 2014, and with every authority; we paid a bribe to get our way through.<sup>277</sup>

It is not uncommon in discourses of chieftaincy in Sierra Leone for chiefs to be presented as corrupt and autocratic (Fanthorpe, 2005; Jackson, 2006; Hanlon, 2005; Casey et al., 2012). In reality, while chiefs remain central to family and local kinship affairs, their powers are constructed and constrained by local kinship networks and traditional ruling coalitions. As one paramount chief acknowledged, 'our authority is rooted in 'shared customary values and traditions, checkmated by a council of elders and land-owning families', who are part of the governance and decision-making process.'<sup>278</sup> The pre-colonial political organisation in rural Sierra Leone was 'based on

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<sup>275</sup> Interview with the Senior District Officer for Bombali District, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>276</sup> An act considered as a sign of respect to the chief and completely permissible in Sierra Leonean culture.

<sup>277</sup> Interview with the local agent of an Italian agricultural company in Sierra Leone, Freetown (May, 2015).

<sup>278</sup> Interview with the Paramount Chief of Kakua Chiefdom, Bo District, Bo City (June, 2015).

families and land’, and ‘precedence went to first-comers...to be joined later by kinsmen and their dependents, who established a successful farming community, to be joined by strangers and accretions’ (Richards et al., 2004:2). Such local kinship structures are crucial in determining access to local positions and land – governed by clear dichotomy between indigenes and strangers; with indigenes referring to the ruling and land-owning families who are mostly the first settlers of a community (Richards et al., 2004; Mokuwa et al., 2011).

Such local political tensions are not always linear ones between chiefs and local councils, or between chiefs and politicians. It is far more sophisticated than that. It involves a complex network of power and interests that brings together chiefs, local and national politicians, public bureaucrats, family and other interest groups. In a well-publicised political drama before the reintroduction of the erstwhile role of District Officer (DO), in 2009 the Vice President visited Moyamba district without a pre-arranged programme or protocol – which normally includes the inspection of a guard of honour and the gathering of local dignitaries in organised town hall meetings with local authorities and senior staff of deconcentrated offices of central government ministries and departments.<sup>279</sup> However, with the colonial role of District Officer who used to coordinate such programmes redundant, the structures of the local councils – though not provided for in law – were expected to carry out such functions. In several councils across the political spectrum the local council chief administrators have been doing so<sup>280</sup> but, as one chief administrator noted, the Moyamba situation was exploited by national bureaucrats for personal gain. The Cabinet Secretary had long opposed the new local government arrangement and considered the suspension of District Officers a political error of the former SLPP-led government. As head of the civil service, he regularly receives huge bribes from district officers during his provincial visits. He therefore unapologetically used the Moyamba incident to make a case to APC politicians that the incident with the Vice President in Moyamba ‘was an act of sabotage by the opposition (considering that Moyamba District Council is controlled by the SLPP and the Moyamba itself is a stronghold of the opposition SLPP) which can be only salvaged by the reintroduction of the DOs’.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Interview with the Senior District Officer for Bombali District, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>280</sup> Interview with the Senior District Officer for Bombali District, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>281</sup> Interview with a serving CA in one of the local councils, Port Loko Town (July, 2015).

It would be misleading to conclude that it was the singular act of persuasion of a supposedly apolitical civil servant that led to the reintroduction of the district officers without the existence of an already fertile ground. However, decentralisation – especially in the realm of social cohesion – appears to be a haphazard project which fails to take on board the complex institutions and processes of conflict prevention and mitigation together.

### *7.3.1 The Limits of Post-War Settlement*

The resettlement of former fighters with access to local resources – such as land – is central to building inclusive political settlements (Castillejo, 2014) and the reconfiguration of local power networks and relationships. In Sierra Leone, this is partly because the civil war itself has been blamed on the systematic exclusion of young people from access to resources and opportunities presided over by rural gerontocracy (Richards et al., 2004; Hanlon, 2005). Land tenure in rural Sierra Leone is partly communally, and partly held by land-owning families – the so-called indigenes,<sup>282</sup> and a ‘chieftaincy structure that plays a significant administrative and custodian role’ (Sturgess and Flower, 2013:2). This custodian role of chiefs became an ‘important function after the war, when many former fighters, returnees and other people were attempting to access or re-access land. Like in most post-war situations, ‘this “return” is complicated, and is linked to issues of restitution, squatting, conflict, and issues of legitimate or illegitimate claims’ (Unruh and Turray 2006:2).

This section argues that post-war decentralisation reform focused entirely on the political, administrative and fiscal institutionalisms of the service delivery functions of local councils, and lacked an inclusive post-war local resettlement process to deal with the dispensation of justice, conflict prevention and mitigation mechanisms, land ownership and use, and political settlement between chiefs and local councils in the management and use of local resources, despite the government rhetoric on decentralisation as a tool for building social cohesion in post-war communities (Government of Sierra Leone, 2002; 2005). At the local level, the section further argues, decentralisation is yet to alter or enhance existing modes of kinship relations and support mechanisms. This lack of post-war socio-political settlement partly accounts for the proliferation of conflict between chiefs and local councils, and communal hostilities

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<sup>282</sup> Also referred to as the indigenes in the previous section.

around land rights and ownership (Albrecht, 2010; Broadbent, 2012; Sturges and Flower, 2013).

Local public service delivery processes – such as the construction of schools, hospitals and agricultural development projects – require land, which local councils have no authority over. ‘In my tenure as mayor’, noted a former mayor, ‘I lost two land-related projects for a hospital and a skills training centre for young people because we could not reach a settlement with the paramount chief.’<sup>283</sup> Although this is not a unique problem, it represents some of the frustrating realities of a non-inclusive post-war land settlement for development purposes, in which the biggest losers were mostly young and unemployed former combatants.<sup>284</sup> During moments of difficulty such as death and illness, when people need support and succour, their first, and sometimes only, source of help is the immediate family, the chief or members of the extended community. Where the local councillor is relied upon as a source of support, he/she is usually part of the extended family or the local ruling coalition.

My two children in Freetown are my hope... They feed me and pay my hospital bills. But I am not alone; almost all my neighbours have children in Freetown, and other big towns, who send rice and money every month. In fact, one of them donated the zinc for the construction of our primary school. We are a big family here, as I also receive help from my neighbour’s children, the same as my children help my relatives and neighbours.<sup>285</sup>

Central to the local bonding and bridging promise of decentralisation are the challenges of local justice, conflict prevention and resolution through early warning mechanisms. Across the case study areas, institutions of conflict prevention and resolution remain largely removed from the local realm as the formal justice sector is tightly centralised (Albrecht, 2010). Security, justice and penal institutions (police, judiciary and the prisons) are seen as a measure of state power and authority.

It is not in the state’s interest to devolve critical institutions of law enforcement, crime and conflict prevention, such as the police and the judiciary. We are a unitary state, and the protection of life and property is a core function of the central government.<sup>286</sup>

Despite this state-centric notion of justice and conflict prevention, estimates suggest that close to 80% of the population rely on non-formal justice mechanisms (chieftaincy

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<sup>283</sup> Interview with a former mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>284</sup> Interview with a former mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>285</sup> Interview with a female community leader in Masimera Chieftdom, Port Loko District (July, 2015).

<sup>286</sup> Interview with a senior officer of the Sierra Leone police force, Freetown (June, 2015).

and local courts) because the formal justice system (magistrate, high, appeal and supreme courts) is slow, centralised and out of reach for most people (Manning, 2009). This contradictory cohabitation between ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ justice mechanisms, and the willingness of the rural poor to opt for the cheapest and easily accessible – even if unfairly dispensed – justice system, suggests a fundamental flaw in the integrative capacity of decentralisation of non-technocratic institutions relevant to local social cohesion. But despite the ‘donor rejection of chieftaincy in the post-war decentralisation architecture’, chiefs overwhelmingly remain in charge of local justice, in addition to local taxes, land and other natural resources (Jackson, 2006; Albrecht, 2010).<sup>287</sup> Until the enactment of the Local Courts Act (2011) – which empowered the Chief Justice to appoint local court officials – paramount chiefs used to perform this function. This overwhelming control of the local judicial system by chiefs who operate their own *barrays* (unofficial courts) in their homes, passing unchallenged verdicts on numberless cases, is a testament to what Jackson (2011:216) refers to as local predatory gerontocracy in rural Sierra Leone:

While the jurisdiction of local courts is mandated by the state, in practice they hear many cases that they should not have heard, and they are known to levy fines in excess of the maximum allowed by law. Oversight of these courts is minimal and...appeal is rare. In addition, local courts are frequently closely tied to chiefs through kin or social networks, allowing an element of elite capture of the local legal system.

In the towns and cities in this study, access to formal justice is still the exclusive preserve of the ‘rich who can afford to pay a bribe or for the service of a lawyer’.<sup>288</sup> In a rape case in Gbanti Kamaranka village, a few miles outside Makeni, a 52 year old man was brought before a local court (presided over by the local paramount chief) for raping a 13 year old primary school girl. In the presence of the paramount chief, the accused pleaded guilty and offered to pay the family of the victim the sum of one million Leones (about \$220) for an out-of-court settlement. According to the mother of the victim, she was compelled to give up the case due to the economic status of her family, and the fact that she has no power to speak against her husband’s decision on the matter: ‘I do love my child, but I am a poor woman, the money will help me start a business and look after my daughter and her four siblings’, she noted resignedly.<sup>289</sup> Perhaps most

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<sup>287</sup> Interview with the Paramount Chief of Kenema, Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>288</sup> Interview with a human rights civil society activist Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>289</sup> Interview with the mother of a 13-year-old rape victim, Gbanti Kamaranka Village, Bombali District (July, 2015).

importantly, the father was a senior member of the local traditional secret society – the *Poro* – which includes the paramount chief and other local dignitaries. In rural Sierra Leone, secret societies such as the *Poro* and the *Wonde* are an integral embodiment of peoples’ socio-cultural fabric and critical in deciding modes of societal conduct, and punishing those who fail to conform:

The connection between the Poro and political authority has always been very strong, and the two mutually reinforce each other... It goes almost without saying that no person can hope to occupy any political office in the chiefdom without being a Poro member. The chief himself is the society’s official patron in all matters external to its business. (Little 1949:204-5)

Members of the Poro had asked the father of the victim not to take the matter to the police and he had consented. ‘I have nothing to say as a wife’, complained the victim’s mother.<sup>290</sup> The researcher later learned through informal chats with young men in the village that the father was an aspirant for the vacant position of section chief. He was afraid that, apart from any punishment he might receive for disobeying the secret society, any recalcitrant behaviour would be considered a form of disloyalty to the paramount chief – who has the sole authority to appoint the section chief.

It remains unclear whether the state or the drafters of the LGA anticipated that decentralisation could lead to a significant reorganisation of traditional justice and law enforcement mechanisms in rural Sierra Leone. But, for many observers of the decentralisation process, it is deceptive to think that chieftaincy (and its draconian powers) alone is the sole source of resentment in rural communities after the civil war. The fact that the decentralisation project itself has no agenda to promote active citizenship rights or inclusive political participation for women and young people demonstrates some of the failures of the technocratic consensus of decentralisation.<sup>291</sup>

#### **7.4 Decentralisation in Towns and Cities: Ethnic Politicisation and the Social Cohesion Link**

Following the thesis’s geo-political and socio-economic analysis of the study areas in Chapters One and Six, this section argues that the four case study areas present unique ethno-linguistic and political variations which are sufficient to account for politically-motivated violence at the local level (Turton 1997). Therefore, in multi-ethnic

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<sup>290</sup> Interview with the mother of a 13-year-old rape victim, Gbanti Kamaranka Village, Bombali District (July, 2015).

<sup>291</sup> Interview with senior officer of the Centre for Local Government and Rural Development, Freetown (August, 2014).

settlements such as Bo and Kenema it is convenient for political elites to fan the flames of division through an ‘us versus them’ dichotomy aimed at vote aggregation. Fox and Hoelscher (2012:434) neatly sum up the threat of elite capture and polarisation of ethnic divisions in fragile democracies:

Elites competing for political power may also seek to mobilize groups along ethnic, racial, or class lines and encourage them to victimize a designated ‘other’ community. This danger is particularly acute in weakly democratic regimes...where political participation is neither fully open nor fully closed, marginalized groups may take up arms against the state...or alternatively target rival groups...thereby resulting in higher levels of social violence.

Despite the lack of reliable data on cross-regional and ethnic settlement in Sierra Leone, anecdotal evidence (Casey et al., 2012; Conteh, 2014) points towards a higher proportion of settlement of northerners – especially the business-like Temne people – in the south-eastern commercial and mining cities of Bo and Kenema. Meanwhile, the reverse is less prevalent in Makeni and Port Loko, except for those on official job postings. Although these cross-regional settlements have not necessarily led to inter-ethnic wars, this section argues that ethnicity (or ethnic nationalism) – rooted on a ‘presumed common ancestry, history, language and culture of all members of the group’ (Smith 1988, pp. 8-9; 1989, in Turton, 1997: 82) – is a major consideration in political alliances and voting preferences in rural Sierra Leone (Kandeh). This is evidenced by the two recent national and local council elections in 2007 (2008 for local elections) and 2012 respectively, in which the north-western Temne-dominated APC party won almost all the parliamentary and local council seats in the north-western regions, while the Mende-dominated south-eastern SLPP party did the same in the south-eastern regions (Casey et al., 2012).

Regardless of this apparent geo-ethnic political divide, the two ethnic groups have for years lived side-by-side with each other without resorting to violence on the basis of their ethnic differences (Kargbo, 2014). This is not to suggest that ethnic-related disturbances do not ever occur between the two groups, nor does this entirely follow Collier and Hoeffler’s (1998, 2004) rational choice explanation of war. But, as one SLPP politician noted, the party seen today by many people as a ‘Mende Man’ party was founded in the northern region by Temne and Soso speaking paramount chiefs such as Adikali Modu of the Port Loko and Kandeh Yumkellah of Kambai districts.<sup>292</sup> Both the

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<sup>292</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council; Bo City (June, 2015).

APC and SLPP had, and continue to have, high profile members from the two major ethnic groups, such as President Ahmad Tejan Kabba from the north, and Vice President Victor Foh from the south-east. Therefore, any analysis ascribing the causes of political violence solely to the ethnic antagonism between a Mende south-eastern and Temne north-western dichotomy without an ethnic instrumentalisation lens is ill-informed and masks the role of politicised ethnicity (Turton, 1997) in Sierra Leone's decentralisation dispensation. Therefore, ethnicity is unlikely to be an effective causal explanation for conflict and societal upheaval, 'because it is not a thing in itself, even though its power to influence behaviour is largely the result of it being seen as a natural property of a group' (Turton, 1997:78).

Turton (1997:78) therefore defines ethnicity as 'a relational concept' that deals with the 'way cultural differences are communicated and it is therefore created and maintained by contact, not by isolation'. According to Cohen (1997:608; in Smith, 2000:24), ethnic belonging can lead to both collective benefit or liability, as ethnicity is both self-defined and sometimes externally imposed. Since 2007 – when the SLPP lost the presidential and parliamentary elections – political tensions have increased with a sense of unease, 'suspicion, fear and misinformation' in Bo and Kenema.<sup>293</sup> On 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2011, there were multiple incidences of ethno-political violence, leading to deaths, wounding and burning of houses in Bo City when the presidential candidate of the SLPP sustained head injuries from a stone, believed to have been thrown by APC supporters led by Mohamed Conte, alias 'Bomb Blast' (Awoko Newspaper, 10 October, 2011). Following this incident, Momoh Kpaka led a group of young men, believed to be SLPP supporters with machetes and petrol bombs, who burnt down the APC party office, the house of APC Bo District Chairman Sheik Sillah, and the APC propaganda and support mobilisation office, nicknamed 'De Pa E Eye'.<sup>294</sup> On the same day, a policeman accidentally shot and killed a commercial motorbike rider who was caught up in riotous exchanges between the police and protesters identified as SLPP supporters, who were also accused of seriously wounding Zainab Mansaray, the southern region chairperson of the APC (Awoko Newspaper, 10 October, 2011). What were of particular significant are the names of the riot leaders from both parties. On the APC side, the leader was named as Mohamed Conteh – a Temne-like name from the northern region – and on

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<sup>293</sup> Interview with a political commentator, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>294</sup> Interpreted literally as 'the eye of the Pa', meaning 'old man', but connotatively meaning informants and those who support mobilisation for the President.

the side of the SLPP, the leader was Momoh Kpaka – a name common in the Mende (south-eastern) naming tradition.<sup>295</sup>

Ethnic-based politics has also taken over the management of resources and public service delivery in the two cities of Bo and Kenema, especially once the tenure of Mayor Sannoh ended in 2012.<sup>296</sup> In Bo City, for instance, the council secured a joint partnership for a city solid waste management project with the international NGO Welt Hunger Hilfe (WHH). The project's objectives included the start-up of a youth-led cleaning initiative through a fee-based door-to-door waste collection programme to be run by youth groups from across the political spectrum, and with provision of technical training, material and financial support by the council (Bawoh and Koroma, 2015). Unfortunately, this was hijacked by ethnic politics within the SLPP-controlled Bo City Council: the youth group that was eventually selected was not only pro-SLPP, it was a group of young men belonging to an extreme camp within the SLPP – eliminating both APC and moderate SLPP youths:

Harold Tucker belongs to a group within the SLPP called Paopa<sup>297</sup> which supports the 2012 SLPP presidential flag-bearer, Julius Maada Bio. All the young men in the 'Clean Bo' project that were chosen for the door-to-door waste collection initiative are all members of the PAOPA group.<sup>298</sup>

Following Mayor Tucker's decision, word quickly reached the APC hierarchy in Freetown that pro-APC youths in Bo had been politically marginalised from the youth job creation initiative by the SLPP-controlled city council. In response, the APC-led government quickly revived an old youth employment scheme, prioritising the labour-intensive public works component, and managed by the Ministry of Youth Affairs.<sup>299</sup> With resources from the Sierra Leone Road Maintenance Fund, the Ministry of Youth Affairs, through the National Youth Commission, kick started the cleaning of Class A roads in the major cities of Freetown, Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Kono. In the pro-SLPP cities of Bo and Kenema, almost all the youths employed in the street-cleaning initiative were APC sympathisers. In fact, the heads of the scheme in Bo and Kenema were both

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<sup>295</sup> Interview with a senior sociology lecturer at Njala University, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>296</sup> Interview with civil society activist, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>297</sup> The word Paopa in local parlance literally means 'at all costs'. According to the SLPP constitution, an unsuccessful presidential candidate cannot seek the party's nomination for a second time. However, Maada Bio has a good following within the party that insists he should be the party's next presidential candidate in the anticipated 2017/18 presidential elections. This group has been dubbed PAOPA – at all costs, by every means.

<sup>298</sup> Interview with a civil society activist, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>299</sup> Interview with the UNDP Governance Programme Manager – Sierra Leone; Freetown (August, 2014).

district youth leaders of the APC in their respective districts.<sup>300</sup> This led to a bifurcation of the two cities with two antagonistic and politically-radicalised youth groups in city street cleaning, where the boundary between class A (central government) and B (local council) roads remain unclear. The division and its lack of clarity led to at least five reported incidences of politically-motivated violence in Bo and at least three in Kenema between 2012 and 2015.<sup>301</sup>

Whilst the subsequent controversy and chaos created by the politics of city cleaning is not necessarily new, what is new is the manner in which decentralisation facilitated the deployment of local level ethnic-based cleavages of youths in communities divided over tribal belonging and their political associations. And in transitional democracies – such as Sierra Leone’s – elites competing for power can easily instrumentalise local governance institutions to invigorate despotism and promote social violence (Boone, 2003; Fox and Hoelscher, 2012). In the southern city of Kenema, for instance, the level of ethno-political antagonism between the APC and the SLPP is propelled by fear and suspicion. For example, there is a strong and popularly held belief among the SLPP politicians in Kenema that the city has, since the election of the APC, been deliberately and consistently denied access to state resources due to its strong SLPP attachment. An oft-discussed case is the donor-funded waste management project, believed to have been originally designed for Bo and Kenema. However, the Kenema component was allegedly hijacked by the APC government and moved to Makeni after the government had threatened to not approve the project if Makeni was left out, arguing that the two pilot projects could not both be in the south-east.<sup>302</sup>

In 2009, the central government funded the upgrade of 250km of city, provincial and district and township roads, which included about 27km in Kenema City. However, the decision as to which roads should be prioritised was delegated to the respective local councils. In Kenema, the city council deliberately selected roads outside the central business district to make it appear as if the city had not benefitted from the central government infrastructure project.<sup>303</sup> Although Kenema City Council officials spun this as an initial strategy designed to make the government reconsider the share of

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<sup>300</sup> Interview with the southern region Ombudsman, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>301</sup> Discussion with the regional police commanders in Bo and Kenema on youth violence, Bo and Kenema cities, May/June 2015.

<sup>302</sup> Interview with a senior civil society activist in Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>303</sup> Interview with a senior civil society activist in Kenema City (June, 2015).

kilometers of roads awarded to the city,<sup>304</sup> in what appeared to be a well-orchestrated media stunt to mock the central government, residents (mostly local SLPP stalwarts) donated the sum of 14 million Leones (about \$3000) through the Provincial Secretary to central government for the maintenance of Kenema City roads. In their presentation, representatives noted that they were tired of ‘the neglect’ and ‘careless abandon’ of Kenema by the government, and since the government was always complaining that it had no money, their donation should be of help to a government that had no resources when it came to Kenema, but did for Makeni (Awoko Newspaper, 21 September, 2015). It is difficult to ascertain whether the donation reached and was accepted by the central government. But, in a similar central government infrastructural initiative – the solar street lights project of 2012 – council officials in Kenema also deliberately chose to mask the project’s visibility by erecting most of the lights in streets outside the city center.<sup>305</sup> The Kenema and Bo cities’ scenarios are emblematic of some of the challenges of party politics in ethnically heterogeneous settlements which provide a fertile ground for the breeding of ethnic violence in a decentralised political system based on party politics.

#### *7.4.1 Small Scale Commercial Traders and Local Politics: The Ethno-Political Divide*

A major form of cross-ethnic interaction in Sierra Leone has traditionally been through the trade and mining sectors, especially in the districts of Bo, Kenema and Kono. The settlement of northern traders in Bo and Kenema particularly, has not only led to the creation of a property-owning class of Temnes, but also a group of northern petty traders that are crucial to the two cities’ revenue generation prospects (Conteh, 2014).<sup>306</sup> This section argues that alongside the ethnic politicisation of decentralisation, the heterogeneous nature of cities such as Bo and Kenema makes them perfect incubators for the breeding of social violence through ethnic-based politics. Decentralisation – especially the political party-based elective component – provides a good opportunity to mobilise the Temne-Mende ethnic divide for political gain (Kandeh, 1992).

Although the Temne-Mende dominance in Sierra Leonean politics – relative to other tribes – is consistent with the argument in the ethnic conflict literature that ethnic conflict is most likely in societies where there are two dominant ethnic groups (Osaghae 1994:17, cf. Smith, 2000:29), it is important to note that the Temne settlers in Bo and

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<sup>304</sup> Interview with a Kenema City Council councillor, Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>305</sup> Interview with a senior local council staff at Kenema City Council, Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>306</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

Kenema have interacted well with the Mende indigenes and the situation has largely remained peaceful and law-abiding, with a number of intermarriages and cross-tribal associations. Whilst keeping their language and cultural values intact, northerners in Bo and Kenema have consistently provided a solid political constituency for the APC party in the south-eastern region. Local settlements such as Bo Number 2 in Bo and Nyandeyama in Kenema are known to be ‘predominantly Temne settlements and solid APC constituencies’.<sup>307</sup> Despite this seeming tranquility, these areas have also been flashpoints of ethno-political conflict and violence in both cities, understanding ethnic conflict ‘as a range of events from articulation of discontent, protest, mobilisation, confrontation, sporadic or sustained violence, and civil war or insurrection, in which ethnicity plays a significant role’ (Smith, 2000:24).

In April and May 2015, for instance, an attempt was made by the Bo City Council to amalgamate two competing trader unions that ‘had become a source of ethno-political rivalry, and a threat to social cohesion’.<sup>308</sup> The United Indigenous, Commercial and Petty Traders Association (UICPTA) and the Sierra Leone Traders Union (SLTU) had previously been a single traders’ union until 2003 when former Vice President Solomon Berewa was alleged to have funded a microcredit scheme believed to be in excess of two hundred million Leones under the banner of indigenous and commercial petty traders.<sup>309</sup> This has been criticised as political bait to lure petty traders into supporting the SLPP.<sup>310</sup> What was meant to be a revolving loan scheme among petty traders turned into chaos after its top executives, who had earlier received huge loans, refused to pay them back, instead opting to break away and form the Sierra Leone Traders Union (SLTU). In a twist of events, the new traders’ union received the support of the SLPP government, including being handed the commercial and petty traders’ offices in Bo; after the breakaway traders’ union had alleged that the core membership of the United Commercial and Petty Trader Association was dominated by northerners who were mostly pro-APC.<sup>311</sup> The division between indigenous commercial and petty traders association and the Sierra Leone traders’ union, literally, though not exclusively, meant a division between Temnes and Mendes among commercial and petty traders of Bo.

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<sup>307</sup> Interview with the southern region Ombudsman, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>308</sup> Interview with the southern region Ombudsman, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>309</sup> Interview with the Secretary General of UICPTA, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>310</sup> Interview with the southern region Ombudsman, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>311</sup> Interview with the President of UICPTA, Bo City (June, 2015).

In a move to bridge the gap and promote social cohesion, Bo City Council facilitated an agreement between the two groups to form a unifying umbrella association – the Sierra Leone Petty Traders Union – to be followed by an executive election. Unfortunately, the popular candidate, Hassan Bangura, a Temne from Port Loko district, was perceived by Bo City Council politicians as too active in the politics of the APC, and they considered it too dangerous to entrust such a position of trust to someone who was not sympathetic to the politics of the city council.<sup>312</sup> Therefore, the SLPP party machinery in Bo worked to ensure Bangura was not elected president of the traders' union. Before the elections, SLPP operatives within city council inflated the voting list of traders by including school pupils and councillors, while the entire 'SLPP Bo district executive joined the campaign trail with a propaganda message that this was an election between the APC and the SLPP...leading to Bangura losing the election by a few votes'.<sup>313</sup>

Blocked from becoming the new president through political machinations, Bangura galvanised a breakaway group of mostly Temne traders – the biggest trading block in the city – and reactivated the Indigenous Petty Traders Association with himself as president. In addition, Bangura also instructed his members not to pay market dues to the council as 'council authorities have declared petty traders 'their enemy''.<sup>314</sup> Bangura's command, largely obeyed by his members, led to constant standoffs between the Bo City Council's metropolitan police officers and petty traders. However, at the provincial security level, most of its top executives are sympathetic to the pro-APC petty traders, largely due to a coalescing of political and ethno-regional sentiment:

The regional police commander is a Temne; the regional resident minister is a member of the APC party, while the regional coordinator for the Office of National Security (ONS) is a known APC activist from Makeni. Any time the council's metropolitan police try to enforce market dues collection; they will be met with an unparalleled reaction from the Sierra Leone Police, under the directives of the resident minister and regional commander – in protection of the Temne-dominated and pro-APC petty traders<sup>315</sup>

In effect, the marketplaces of Bo City became theatres of violence and proxy wars between the Mende-dominated pro-SLPP traders' union and the Temne-dominated pro-APC petty traders association. Such standoffs produced and reinforced narratives

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<sup>312</sup> Interview with the southern region Ombudsman, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>313</sup> Interview with a civil society activist Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>314</sup> Interview with a civil society activist Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>315</sup> Interview with a member of the provincial Security Council – southern region, Bo City (June, 2015).

of otherness and the forces of ethnic tribalism in Sierra Leone's political topography (Kandeh, 1992; Boone, 2003). But, as Vail (1998:15 in Welsh, 1996:480) argued, ethnicity is not a foregone conclusion but a societal construct ascribed to individuals:

Men came to think of themselves as belonging to particular ethnic groups, then, not because being a member of the group made them feel good, but rather because the ethnic apparatus of the rural area—the chiefs, 'traditional' courts, petty bourgeois intellectuals, and the systematized 'traditional' values of the 'tribe' as embodied in the ethnic ideology—all worked to preserve the very substantial interests which these men had in their home areas.

Mayor Tucker acknowledged and corroborated Vail's (1998) argument, saying that the decision to manipulate the traders' union election in favour of an SLPP candidate was taken by the SLPP's top political hierarchy above him, that he regretted it and was seeking an active solution: 'I am doing my best to resolve this issue. I have spoken to Hassan Bangura, and we will resolve this shortly', noted Mayor Tucker in an upbeat mood.<sup>316</sup> Political tribalism in this context does not necessarily include primordial ethnic hatred, but rather an instrumentalisation of ethnic identity to achieve a political goal (Welsh, 1996).

#### *7.4.2 Intra-Party Politics: Changing Dynamics of Service Delivery and Social Cohesion*

Since the rollout of devolution in 2004, the dynamics of decentralisation politics and its social cohesion implications have changed significantly. Many Bo City residents, for instance, believe that the Bo City Council of Mayor Sannoh was very different to the one under Mayor Tucker. Indeed, during observation in the council's offices, a sense of disorganisation permeated the office building, its employees and their activities. While the CA was smoking cigarettes in his office corridor on a Monday morning, a team of tax collectors came into the office of the cashier, in what looked like a daily ritual to collect transportation allowances to their tax collection locations. The cashier, apparently unhappy because the mayor was not in his office to sign the transport vouchers, slammed his office door and left the council premises without saying a word to the waiting tax collectors. The council's valuation officer exclaimed: 'Bo City Council has changed indeed; everyone is now boss in his own kingdom'.<sup>317</sup>

This section argues that a significant threat to social cohesion – perhaps in equal proportion to ethnic politicisation and technocratic institutionalism – in Sierra Leone's

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<sup>316</sup> Interview with the Mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>317</sup> Comments by the Bo City Council's Valuation Officer during field observation, Bo City (June, 2015).

decentralisation dispensation is competing factional interests and schisms within political parties. Political parties, argued Boucek (2009:455-6) ‘are not monolithic structures but collective entities in which competition, divided opinions and dissent create internal pressures...which often trigger the formation of factions that render the unitary-actor-assumption highly questionable’. In decentralised local governments in the developing world, where ethnic tribalism is a major political mobilisation force, ‘intra-political party conflicts have become rife, and politicians are deploying large resources to out-do each other, changing the rules of the political game, distorting laws and employing violence and political assassination to settle political scores’ (Okpogba et al., 2012:81). Therefore, to understand the corollary of social cohesion in the context of the current ethno-political divide and its associated social violence in the cities of Bo and Kenema exclusively without an analysis of political party dynamics would be a serious reductionist fallacy, like the donor-led neoliberal institutionalism over political economy, in Sierra Leone’s decentralisation project.

In Bo City , some of the inhabitants’ concerns about the failing leadership of Mayor Tucker are visible – such as overfilled garbage dump sites, a drop in the city’s CLoGPAS performance ranking (from first in 2011 to fifth in 2013) and reported cases of mismanagement and maladministration (New Citizen Newspaper, 15 April, 2015). However, Mayor Tucker insists that criticisms of his performance relative to his predecessor are unsubstantiated, as under his administration Bo City has increased its local revenue collection, supported youth employment schemes and has better city cleaning interventions than in the days of his predecessor:

When Dr. Sannoh was mayor, there was only one garbage compressor and one skip vehicle. Today, we have two compressors and six skip vehicles – people are simply reminiscing [about] the first time they saw a garbage compressor in Bo...We are doing better and the former mayor’s image and legacy are no threat to my job.<sup>318</sup>

Kenema also fell in the CLoGPAS ranking, from second in 2011 to sixth in 2013, while Makeni and Port Loko rose from eighth and third in 2011 to sixth and second in 2013, respectively. Makeni’s improvement has been generally associated with its first female mayor, Sunkari Kabba. With a background in development management and a long career with the UN children’s organisation, UNICEF, and the transfer of Bo City Council’s former CA to Makeni, the two make a good combination: an energised CA

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<sup>318</sup> Interview with Mayor Tucker of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

and a female mayor with a development management pedigree.<sup>319</sup> The two have paired up well to increase the city's revenue generation, cleaning and youth employment opportunities – such as the ten car-wash centers across the city and a traditional *gara* tie and dye project for over 250 young people in the city.<sup>320</sup> In Port Loko, the decision to award the APC symbol (official party nomination) for the 2012 local council elections to Chairman Fofanah over his former deputy, Neneh Turay, provides a moment of quietness and concentration on development planning and implementation due to a reduction in internal divisions between the Fofanah and Turay camps.

Intra-party divisions within the two leading political parties have negative social cohesion implications at the local level as the political nature of Sierra Leone's decentralisation and its institutions gave enormous powers to political parties in the decision-making process – both for the election of local representatives and the delivery of local public services (Kandeh, 2012; Conteh, 2014; Kargbo, 2014). In Bo and Kenema cities, for instance, the division between the Paopa and anti-Paopa (or anti-Maada Bio – the 2012 presidential candidate for the opposition SLPP) groups has led to increased intra-party violence within the SLPP, including the killing of an anti-Maada Bio SLPP supporter by an allegedly a pro-Bio supporter in early June 2016 (Awareness Times Newspaper, 9 June, 2016). In another ugly intra-party altercation in April 2015, a group of youths believed to be PAOPA supporters and allegedly under the instructions of Mayor Tucker barricaded the house of former Mayor Sannoh, threatening to burn it down. Apparently, Mayor Tucker had accused his predecessor of anti-Maada Bio activities and undermining his authority through his regular visits to the city's markets – an act which portrays Mayor Tucker to be out of touch with his constituents<sup>321</sup>

Yes, I used to occasionally take a walk to the markets... The traders are always happy to see me; some of them will offer me gifts. But in recent times I have stopped, because I understand it's becoming an issue with some local politicians. During my tenure, I understood the centrality of market dues to the council's finances, so I kept a good relationship with petty traders, regardless of their political belonging.<sup>322</sup>

Although Sannoh's attackers were repelled by another group of SLPP youths opposed to the PAOPA camp, the very act of physical threat to a high profile local politician from within the same political party is indicative of the internal cracks within the SLPP

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<sup>319</sup> Interview with the CA of Makeni City Council, Makeni City (June, 2015).

<sup>320</sup> Interview with the CA of Makeni City Council, Makeni City (June, 2015).

<sup>321</sup> Interview with a senior staff member of the Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>322</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

and how local politics can easily promote fractionalisation and the disturbance of local peace and harmony (Boucek, 2009).

As the next local council elections draws nearer, succession tensions are on the increase within the ruling APC as to who will succeed Chairman Fofanah of Port Loko, whose second and final term expires at the end of 2016. The old division fuelled by the Kemoh Sesay/Alpha Kanu dichotomy has resurfaced, leading to bickering and confrontations in public meetings between the current deputy chairman and the former deputy chairwoman – who has not given up on her chairmanship ambition.<sup>323</sup> In Makeni, Mayor Sunkari faces the double challenge of being a woman in Sierra Leone's men's world of politics and endless conspiracies from within the Makeni APC party hierarchy who see her management style as a threat to their survival. Her decision to remove a lucrative hospital cleaning contract from a company linked to the APC's former Youth Affairs Minister has increased calls from within the party, to 'cut her down to size'.<sup>324</sup> While the study of intra-party factionalism as an academic field is not new (Rose, 1964; Hine, 1982; Bettcher, 2005), Belloni and Beller (1978) argued that the context and structural organisation of political parties provides the basis for the extent of intra-party division. In Sierra Leone, the political nature of decentralisation, alongside its ethnic politicisation, suggests that political parties are central to the use of local power and local public service delivery processes.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed and analysed the main social cohesion findings of the thesis, linking them in an integrated analysis that brought on board actor motivations and the institutional arrangement of decentralisation, and the processes of resource allocation and local public service delivery. The chapter was built around analytical variables of ethnic politicisation, political expansionism and political rivalry over power and resources to explain the implications of Sierra Leone's decentralisation model on local social cohesion in a polarised post-war context. The chapter provides strong context-specific analytical evidence detailing the political and legal inconsistencies between the espoused social cohesion aspirations of the state versus the actual social cohesion provisions of the LGA, and the limits of the neoliberal institutional compliance strategy of donors and local political manoeuvring in the implementation of the LGA and rollout of devolution. More critically, this chapter analysed the role of ethnic politics in

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<sup>323</sup> Interview with a senior civil society activist, Port Loko Town (July, 2015).

<sup>324</sup> Interview with a civil society activist, Makeni City (July, 2015).

igniting political tensions and ethnic rivalry at the local level in a decentralisation dispensation that failed to incorporate holistic post-war governance, justice, security and land rights settlements. However, such ethnic divisions, the chapter concludes, are much more pronounced in towns and cities than rural communities and that intra-party political division are, in themselves, a significant threat to social cohesion as much as inter-party divisions and ethnic politics.

## Chapter Eight

### Decentralisation Reform: Limits of Neoliberal Institutionalism

#### 8.0 Introduction

It is not uncommon for governance reform initiatives and development aid programmes in the global south to be characterised by buzzwords such as ‘donor-led’, ‘donor-funded’ or ‘internationally-driven’, both in their description and assessment of success and/or failure (Clist, 2009). Although the validity of such expressions remains unclear, and they usually omit the influence of national political actors, they demonstrate both the growing influence and criticism of international actors in their involvement in aspects of development and public sector management in the global south once considered the exclusive preserve of national governments.

The chapter questions and problematises the donor-led technocratic governance reform agenda which proffers institutional technicism as a counter to the negative effects of party politics in fiscal decentralisation in the developing world (Hibbs, 1996; Schmidt, 1996; Keefer, 2002; Bird, 2003; Ahmad et al., 2004, Greenwood, 2008; Steger and Roy, 2010; Bevir, 2011). It also questions the nature of the donor-led technocratic institutional arrangement of decentralisation and the extent to which the various institutions cooperate, and the implication of such cooperation, or lack of it, in the planning and delivery of devolved local public services and the enhancement of social cohesion in post-war Sierra Leone. The aim is to provide answer(s) to sub-question four of the thesis, which seeks to explain the extent to which Sierra Leone’s decentralisation model was a product of an externally-led governance reform project, the outcome of local political motivations and influence or a combination of both.

It argues that although Sierra Leone’s post-war decentralisation project was heavily influenced by external actors – with the use of many off-the-shelf decentralisation best practices from other parts of the world – the final structure of the decentralisation model was a patchwork of multiple interests. This complex mix of interests, the chapter suggests, was influenced both by the fragile nature of the post-war state in Sierra Leone, and the prevailing international security and governance world order post the 9/11 terror attacks in the United States of America. The desire to accommodate the diverse interests and motivations of decentralisation actors, and the complexity of their institutional preferences, led to a hybridisation of approaches and competition among

different decentralisation institutions that failed to sufficiently integrate local agents of social cohesion into a holistic programme of decentralisation to promote local trust and cooperation. In a devolution context highly influenced by party politics and donor funding, institutions without the financial aid of donors and the political help of the central government have fallen along the way, leading to the breakdown in the institutional arrangement of decentralisation under the weight of its organisational contradictions.

Following the introductory section, the next section analyses Sierra Leone's decentralisation model with the aim of explaining its key features and whether it is a product of external or local influence, or a combination of both. Section three discusses the composition and limitations of local governance human resource management and its levels of interaction and integration with the national civil service cadre. In section four, the chapter focuses on the challenges of the ideological differences between the main external actors – the World Bank and DfID – and how the extent of their ideological variations affected the nature, strength and collaboration of the different decentralisation institutions. Sections five and six analyse the composition, cooperation and/or competition among the various decentralisation institutions and questions the extent to which their creation hinges on the technocratic outlook of Sierra Leone's decentralisation project over contextual considerations. The concluding section summarises the chapter, pinpointing the chapter's main conclusions drawn from the evidence and analyses in support of the chapter's core argument.

### **8.1 Decentralisation: Whose Interest and Voice Mattered?**

Sierra Leone's highways are littered with thousands of billboards advertising donor-funded interventions in almost all sectors of life – from governance reform to infrastructure, health and education. The list is endlessly reverberating, producing a deafening reminder of the country's dependence on donor support and the crowded and fragmented field of development intervention and its varying motives – ranging from altruistic considerations to a desire to push an outright neoliberal agenda (Macauley, 2012). As Clist (2009:1) suggests, development 'aid and its allocation has been much maligned in recent years' due to its failure to reduce poverty and promote economic growth, considered an inherent feature of aid and 'the consequence of poor allocation practice by donors'. Boone (1998) argues that the impact of development aid has nothing to do with the type of political system of the recipient nation – whether it is

a democracy or a dictatorship. Rather, aid increases the size of the government of the recipient state, but it does not increase investment, nor benefit the poor, as measured by improvements in human development indicators (Boone, 1998:289). It is this unproductive nature of aid intervention in Africa that Moyo (2010), in her critique of neoliberal aid intervention, referred to as 'dead aid'.

Sierra Leone's decentralisation programme was part of a bigger project of post-war state building largely based on the World Bank's Institutional Reform and Governance Effectiveness Model (Santiso, 2001; Jordana and Levi-Faur, 2004; Agbese and Kier Jr., 2007).<sup>325</sup> Its aim was to reduce the scope and functions of (donor-labeled) dysfunctional and unproductive state institutions, and to (re)create new, semi-autonomous and functionally viable ones managed by transparent and accountable decision-making procedures. The model argues that the promotion of a viable decentralised system of services delivery managed by efficient and accountable public institutions and free from traditional bureaucratic red tape provides the most potent option for active private sector participation and enhanced public service delivery (Agbese and Kier Jr., 2007). But, according to Finkelstein (1995:368), 'we say "governance" because we don't really know what to call what is going on' or we are trying to protect the World Bank, as the Bank's new role as the global governance advocate possibly violates its non-political articles of association. This global managerialism of the World Bank (Murphy, 2008) has transformed the post-World War II financial institution from one whose goal was combatting global poverty into a governance and managerial institution whose founding was rooted in neoliberal market-oriented principles of public service delivery and liberal governance (World Bank, 1989; Harrison, 2004; Murphy, 2008). The government of Sierra Leone's willingness to embrace this state-building agenda was a big motivation for the donor community, desperate to seize the opportunity of the government's post-war goodwill (Srivastava and Larizza, 2011). It was against this backdrop that the World Bank supported a fast-track programme of decentralisation similar to governance reform initiatives in post-Suharto Indonesia in 1999 (Larizza and Glynn, 2011).

While the Bank preferred a more neoliberal approach to governance reform, DfID, on the other hand, was much more receptive to the government's priorities, one of which sought to make traditional rulers an integral part of the decentralisation process. Following DfID's decision to fund the Paramount Chief Restoration Project (PCRP),

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<sup>325</sup> Other models of state building include power-sharing, constitutional political and state deconstruction models (see Agbese and Kier Jr., 2007).

the Bank described DfID's action as a disruptive aberration, short of radical bureaucratic transformation (Mbawa, 2012). The Bank was concerned about the government's lackluster commitment to genuine democratic governance reform and considering the Bank's opposition to what it considered the undemocratic tenets of chieftaincy and other local power structures, it pushed for electoral decentralisation through devolution (Jackson, 2005, 2006; Fanthorpe et al., 2011). Democratic decentralisation, in the Bank's view, presupposes greater citizen participation and the transformation of 'neo-patrimonial, rent-seeking political regimes' in favour of greater private sector participation in a liberalised service delivery landscape (Woodward, 2011:90).

However, international actors do not necessarily have a shared philosophy about peace and state building in post-war contexts despite their vague agreement on some normative concepts such as disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR); they each espouse 'different institutional cultures and political agendas, and often opposing senses of what should be prioritized' (Mayall and de Oliveira, 2011:18). Renkow and Slade (2013) observed a similar trend in Ethiopia on the huge ideological divide between donors operating in the same context. Some donors such as USAID and the World Bank took a 'strong Washington-consensus view of the role of markets and the state'; others such as DfID and the UNDP took a subtler approach than the overtly market-oriented preference of the Bank (Murphy, 2008; Dann, 2013; Renkow and Slade, 2013:7). In Sierra Leone, the UNDP, for instance, considers decentralisation as a vehicle for democratic good governance as the devolution of public services through democratically-elected local councils represents the single most significant political reform in the country's political history since independence (UNDP, 2004). However, UNDP's role – beyond funding initial consultations and country case studies of the Ghanaian and Ugandan decentralisation initiatives – fell short of the fast-moving decentralisation bandwagon due to its inability to fund the expensive implementation stage of the decentralisation legislation.<sup>326</sup>

The World Bank's governance reform choices, on the other hand, were influenced by institutional neoclassical economics of rational choice *homo-economicus* and principal-agent theories of public service delivery (Rondenilli, et al., 1989; Cramer, 2002; World Bank, 2003). The Bank held a strong opinion that the public sector is over-staffed and

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<sup>326</sup> Interview with the Head of Governance, UNDP –Sierra Leone, Freetown (August, 2014).

inefficient because of politicians and public bureaucrats pursuing narrow political and self-seeking interests (World Bank, 2003). For the Bank, decentralised service delivery is fundamentally a matter of technical efficiency and managerial competence, which was absent in the mainstream public bureaucracy.<sup>327</sup> But, as the Bank pushed for a neoclassical economic outlook of local governance reform agenda, DfID opted for a more cooperative approach with the government. Considering the strong historical ties between Sierra Leone and the UK, one would expect DfID – as opposed to the World Bank – to demonstrate a better political economy appreciation of the context, hence its approach. In a 2002 DfID-funded chieftaincy public perception survey, it found that despite growing public desire for chieftaincy reform, the institution remained highly popular among Sierra Leoneans. Therefore, the Bank’s commitment to disregard chieftaincy in local governance reform was going against the grain (Harris, 2013).

However, it was the fragile nature of the post-war state in Sierra Leone – in both security and economic terms – that made the state amenable to donor dictates on the nature and scale of decentralisation reform:

We were coming out of a civil war that affected every facet of our wellbeing...We don’t have the money and we don’t know where to start in the reconstruction of the country. Donors have the money and the technical expertise to help us, but we must speak the language of the day – that of governance reform and decentralisation... Government had no choice, but to comply with donor dictates.<sup>328</sup>

The state’s dependency on donors to fund multiple sectors of societal wellbeing, including post-war reconstruction priorities such as DDR and SSR, demonstrates a further withering of an already fragile state, whilst increasing the leverage of the international community on state policy formulation and implementation (Srivastava and Larizza, 2011; Kandeh, 2012; Harris, 2013). Given the fact that the government was somewhat uncertain how devolution would affect local power relations, its commitment to full scale decentralisation was lackluster and sometimes inconsistent (Gaima, 2009; Conteh, 2014). The state’s economic fragility and donor-dependency led to stringent donor preconditions on governance reform. In 2003, for instance, the World Bank made the speedy passing of the Local Government Act (LGA) a precondition for its

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<sup>327</sup> Interview with the Director of the Decentralisation Secretariat, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>328</sup> Interview with the former Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Freetown (September, 2014).

\$24 million funding to roll out decentralisation and local public service delivery and the funding of other development projects in the country (World Bank, 2004).<sup>329</sup>

It would be deceptive to conclude on the basis of the fragility of the post-war state alone that the decentralisation programme in Sierra Leone was entirely a donor-driven project. Indeed, most of the institutional structures of decentralisation – including the Decentralisation Secretariat (DecSec) and the Local Government Finance Department (LGFD) – were largely donor creations with no legal basis under the LGA (Gaima, 2009). Beyond the financial leverage of donors, used to subdue a bankrupt post-war state, the government of Sierra Leone was also motivated by the desire to gain political capital by means of political control of the periphery to enable it to distribute favours to political patrons (Boone, 2003; Fanthorpe et al., 2011). Decentralisation has been used intermittently by all the main political parties in the country's post-independence political history to subdue the periphery and consolidate political power. In 1972, for instance, the APC government of Siaka Stevens dissolved the post-independence local government system, claiming that local councils had become corrupt, inefficient and a burden to central government (Fanthorpe, 2005; Jackson, 2005). However, critics argue that the dissolution of local government by the Stevens administration was part of a bigger project of power consolidation, designed to eliminate and co-opt all forms of opposition before the declaration of one-party rule in 1978; making SLPP the biggest victim of one-party rule and the dissolution of the post-colonial local government system (Tangri, 1978).

After its re-election in 2002, the SLPP was poised to consolidate its grip on power to guarantee its political survival and prevent a return to the 1970s when it was completely wiped from the political map of Sierra Leone (Srivastava and Larizza, 2011; Conteh, 2014). The SLPP's decentralisation rhetoric of handing over power to the people resonated deeply with traumatised and marginalised people of Sierra Leone who had witnessed three decades of one-party rule, eleven years of civil war and over five years of military dictatorship; the 'SLPP read the mood of the people, and acted accordingly'.<sup>330</sup> The political elites' willingness to decentralise after the war was both a rational and strategic political decision by the SLPP. During public consultations prior to the formulation of the LGA, for instance, Sierra Leoneans overwhelmingly preferred

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<sup>329</sup> Interview with the former Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>330</sup> Interview with a senior political science lecturer – University of Sierra Leone, Freetown (June, 2015).

a non-partisan local government system. When the proposal was presented to the government, the then SLPP-led government rejected it and according to the government's legal adviser – the Attorney General - barring political parties from participating in local council elections would be unconstitutional (Fanthorpe, 2005; Conteh, 2014). The SLPP was convinced that based on its huge electoral mandate in the 2002 presidential elections – winning over 70% of the popular vote – decentralisation would offer the party the opportunity to stretch its influence and control across the country.<sup>331</sup>

Beyond the SLPP's desire to strengthen its political reach and control outside Freetown, the party was also motivated by the desire to share the potential decentralisation loot by strategically positioning party loyalists to control state and donor resources at the local level. The SLPP was confronted with a post-war challenge of dealing with unemployed party loyalists who, had been in the political wilderness since the party lost power in 1967 (Fanthorpe et al., 2011). The local government system, with its potential for donor funding, provided an avenue to decongest the already bloated and heavily centralised public bureaucracy away from Freetown (where party elites roamed around in search of jobs (Workman, 2013; Conteh, 2014) to the provinces, where they were guaranteed access to resources and a political career. Therefore, regardless of the donor apprehension regarding chieftaincy involvement in the decentralisation process, the SLPP was determined to ensure chiefs were not left out; they knew that if chiefs had some control, then government would certainly have some leverage, given the historical ties between chiefs and the SLPP (Fanthorpe, 2005). This was confirmed by a former SLPP government minister:

The government was committed to actively involve chiefs in the local government dispensation, but our donor partners had a negative view about chiefs after the war. They perceived chieftaincy as an undemocratic institution, although as a government, we held a contrary opinion.<sup>332</sup>

But this was not a political game played by the SLPP alone; the APC also benefitted and actively used decentralisation to rekindle its political survival after its overthrow in 1992:

We supported the reintroduction of local councils because we believed it was a way of reducing the excesses of the SLPP and improving the impoverished lives of people in the rural communities. But it also gave us the opportunity to govern again...winning the

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<sup>331</sup> Interview with the former national chairman of the SLPP, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>332</sup> Interview with a former deputy minister of local government, Freetown (September, 2014).

Freetown city and other council elections in 2004 galvanised the party to believe that we can win elections again...and rule, after the 1992 military coup.<sup>333</sup>

With a broken infrastructure, a government dependent on donor support for public services and a weak political opposition, decentralisation played a multifaceted role in post-war peace building and governance reform in Sierra Leone. While donors were able to push for reasonable political reform, political elites were able to hang on to the thread of decentralisation to both distribute favours to their clients and extend their grip on power and their political control outside Freetown. However, crucially too, the opposition was able to participate in the governance process in a political landscape dominated by a winner-takes-all politics. The Director of DecSec neatly summed up the decentralisation model as a compromise of various interests:

The people did not get the non-partisan elections they wanted, but provisions were made for independent candidates and ward committees, borrowed largely from Uganda. The government secured the active participation of political parties and the passive participation of chiefs based on the Ghanaian model. But crucially, the international community succeeded in getting government to devolve functions and created semi-autonomous decentralisation institutions such as DecSec and LGFD, staffed outside the regular civil service.<sup>334</sup>

Despite this manageable compromise, several questions still linger: were the institutions of decentralisation designed to work together or against each other? Have the decentralisation institutions lived up to their expectations? Should donors have had a more assertive posture, or a lighter footprint, with a greater appreciation of the local context? (Ghani and Lockhart, 2008; Woodward, 2011:99). These questions remain crucial, because understanding the dynamics of post-war state building and governance reform processes presupposes an understanding of the role of institutions as agents of public policy formulation and decision-making (Boone, 2003). However, the challenges in achieving genuine local level political economy appreciation in Sierra Leone's decentralisation project are rooted in a development model copied from the West; one that seeks to make developing countries look and behave like their western donor countries (North et al., 2007), and where the standard meaning of good governance is defined – by the World Bank – as the efficient management of the public sector by ‘a

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<sup>333</sup> Interview with a national executive official of the APC, Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>334</sup> Interview with the Director of DecSec, Freetown (August, 2014).

capable state, accountable to its citizens and operating under the rule of law (North, 2000; World Bank, 2002; Kaufmann and Kraay, 2008:1).

## **8.2 Local Council Human Resources: The Illusion of Power**

Local councils have two sets of employees – core, and sectoral or devolved employees. Core staff members were recruited in 2009 and consist of 14 administrative posts in each of the 19 councils, managed by the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC). Under the provisions of the LGA, the LGSC is responsible for providing regulatory and performance management functions for local councils (World Bank, 2014). However, the 2010 decentralisation policy provides that by the end of 2016, local councils should have taken full responsibility on all matters of local human resource management, including recruitment, discipline, capacity and career development. In the meantime, however, the LGSC was to continue providing human resources (HR) management functions for local councils. This section argues that the HR management functions provided by the LGSC to local councils were built around technocratic formalism that fails to integrate central and local public service HR management systems, or give full control and authority to local councils for the management of their respective human resource needs. The two tiers of local level service delivery employees (core and devolved) present a complex and uncoordinated system of human resource management at the local level.

In 2008, as part of the HR management functions' strengthening of local councils, the EU supported an HR functional needs assessment which led to the establishment and recruitment of 14 core positions in each local council by late 2009.<sup>335</sup> Although the LGSC argued strongly that the recruitment of core council employees was conducted with the full involvement of councils, most council authorities believed they were co-opted into a process designed and led by Freetown-based bureaucrats:

Copies of the vacancies were sent to us for public display; shortlisting was done in Freetown and the interview date set in Freetown. I was asked to be part of the interview panel... Does that make me in charge of recruitment?<sup>336</sup>

A major limitation to effective local level HR management is the technician approach to staffing for local councils. The assumption that all 19 councils have the same staff needs was not only unrealistic, the 14 core positions and their terms of reference were decided

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<sup>335</sup> Interview with the Executive Secretary, LGSC, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>336</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (October, 2014).

by an EU-hired consultant whose understanding of council-specific human resources needs and complexities remained unclear. As one local council chairperson noted, it is irrational to assume that ‘Kenema District Council with over 50 councillors and 377,000 residents will have the same staffing requirements as Bonthe Municipal Council with 10,000 residents and 12 councillors’.<sup>337</sup> In the iron ore-rich councils of Port Loko and Tonkolili, for instance, there is more need for a mining officer – a position not part of the current core staff – than an ICT officer, for instance. Unfortunately, ‘[the] council can only recruit locally if we have the money; we cannot swap staff positions to meet local needs’, lamented a senior council employee.<sup>338</sup>

In addition, the centralised and technocratic system of local councils’ HR management has many accountability and supervisory limitations at the local level. Since council core staff are paid by the central government through the fiscal grant formula and managed by the LGSC, their accountability is tilted upward to the central government rather than downward to local councils. For example, the relationship between mayors and chairpersons and their chief administrators has not always been a good one, but since the political heads are unable to fire core staff, they can only ask for their transfer. In Bo City Council, for instance, the mayor accused his CA of indiscipline and insubordination, but it appeared the CA has strong political backing in Freetown. At the ministerial level, the permanent secretary in the local government ministry wanted the CA to be fired; the local government service commission, on the other hand, favoured transferring him while the local government minister wanted to keep him in post. Although the CA was eventually transferred, the motivations of both the minister and the permanent secretary were deemed to be political in nature. The minister was essentially seeking new political friends by destabilising an opposition council, while the permanent secretary – a Mende by tribe, and naturally sympathetic to the SLPP – was seen to be promoting an SLPP agenda.<sup>339</sup> Such ethno-political meddling in local governance HR management is not unique to Sierra Leone; as Bangura and Larbi (2006:12) noted, the devolved health sector in Ghana, for instance, ‘lacked both the authority to hire and fire, or to manage their own budget independently of central authority’.

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<sup>337</sup> Interview with the Chairman of Kenema District Council (October, 2014).

<sup>338</sup> Interview with the CA of Port Loko District Council, Port Loko (July, 2015).

<sup>339</sup> Interview with a senior staff member of the LGSC – Freetown (September, 2014).

In addition, the structural organisation of local governance HR management, involving councils, the LGSC and the local government ministry, promotes institutional infighting and politicised decision-making processes, leading to disagreement and controversy over the recruitment and transfer of local council employees. At the time of writing, at least one vacancy exists among the core staff of each of the four case study councils. In Port Loko District Council, for instance, two of the council's fourteen core employees have never been rotated – a practice common with the local government service commission, usually done annually - since their recruitment in 2009, while those who had been transferred left without handing over notes or arranging induction sessions for incoming staff, leading to administrative discontinuity and poor performance. During an unofficial conversation with some council employees in Port Loko, it became clear that the two local core staff members that have never been rotated are both indigenes of Port Loko Town, with family ties to the deputy minister of local government. Their family connection with the deputy local government minister (whose ministry supervises the decentralisation process) gave them a valuable shield and kept them permanently stationed in their home district. At the national level, the LGSC believed that the staffing challenges in councils have been exacerbated by the local government ministry's growing usurpation of the commission's responsibilities:

The minister and her permanent secretary have taken over the transfer of local council core staff; we (LGSC) are only asked to sign the posting list to legitimise their action. Unfortunately, our commissioners are in full support of this power grab.<sup>340</sup>

Such comments from the LGSC are emblematic of a local government human resources system deeply entrenched in institutional infighting and politicised decision-making over the functional management of local councils' HR capacity. But the complicity of the LGSC's commissioners – mostly retirees loyal to the ruling party – justifies some of the fundamental flaws of the LGA which empowers the President to appoint LGSC commissioners. Caught in what Bangura and Larbi (2006:15) referred to as the 'low wage-corruption-low morale-low performance trap', and with a high staff attrition rate from the local government service, motivation and morale among local council employees, remains abysmally low. Most of the district officers, who were previously seconded to the councils as chief administrators, have returned to the central civil service. As one former CA noted, 'as district officer I can be promoted to the rank

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<sup>340</sup> Interview with a senior staff member of the LGSC – Freetown (September, 2014).

of provincial secretary, then to a permanent secretary, and even cabinet secretary... Unfortunately, I don't have such career prospects in the local government service'.<sup>341</sup>

The monthly salary payment arrangement for local council core staff has remained unchanged since 2009: 75% central government and 25% local council contributions. But as one local council staff said, not only are the district councils notorious for not paying their staff salary contributions, staff salaries have not changed since 2009; the average take-home pay of core staff is about \$200 per month.<sup>342</sup> At the national level, however, control over recruitment, pay and transfers of civil servants is not only seen as a policy issue, but also a matter of power and authority. The state is willing to devolve more power, 'but we don't want to abdicate our responsibilities to local councils... Decentralisation does not mean giving up your responsibilities', affirmed a senior director in the ministry of education.<sup>343</sup>

Unlike core staff members who are recruited by the LGSC and directly supervised by the local councils' chief administrators, sectoral employees are full-time employees of central MDAs who are deployed at the local level and managed by their respective line ministries, full authority over their postings to councils. This structure of devolved sector management at the local level means that councils have almost no control over devolved sector employees. This centralised pattern of staff management in developing countries means that whilst 'local government personnel in OECD countries, for instance, constitute about 42% of all government employees, they made up only 21% in Asia, 29% in Latin America and 10% in Africa' (Hella and Tait 1983, cf. Olowu, 2006:237).

Since devolved sector employees are managed centrally, their postings rarely follow needs-based allocation at the local level, a situation described by one mayor as luck-driven allocation of administrative capacity (World Bank, 2014). Devolved sector employees are neither accountable to citizens nor to the elected local representatives in their local postings; flouting agent-principal relations in the local governance and accountability chain (Rondinelli et al., 1989; Ahmad et al., 2005). 'We have received complaints from parents about absenteeism by teachers in some of our schools', complained a council chairperson, 'but there is hardly anything the council can

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<sup>341</sup> Interview with former CA - District Officer, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>342</sup> Interview with the CA of Kenema City Council, Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>343</sup> Interview with a senior director in the Ministry of Education – Freetown (August, 2014).

do...Complaints can be made to us, but direct punitive action resides in Freetown'.<sup>344</sup> Achieving multiple accountability between citizens, elected representatives and local public servants will require transparent vertical human resource management systems that are consistent with the functional responsibilities devolved to councils in line with the principle of true devolution and rural empowerment (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Kothari and Minogue, 2002,; Bird, 2003).

### **8.3 Technocratic Institutionalism: Donors versus Local Actors**

This section analyses the limits of technocratic institutionalism in Sierra Leone's decentralisation project and argues that the proliferation and uncoordinated nature of decentralisation institutions hinge on a donor desire to enforce neoliberal institutional compliance (Steger and Roy, 2010; Marriage, 2013) to possibly off-set the negative effects of political affiliation in fiscal decentralisation (Schmidt, 1996; Hibbs, 1992; Ahmad et al., 2005). The World Bank's \$24 million funding towards decentralisation reform was crucial to the rollout of the LGA and capacity development interventions for the new local councils, but the Bank was sceptical about direct central government management of resources and used this to justify the need for a Bank-created semi-autonomous agency, the Institutional Reform and Capacity Building Project (IRCBP), to coordinate and manage the Bank's funded decentralisation roll-out project. The project's four specialised units, the Decentralisation Secretariat (DecSec), Local Government Finance Department (LGFD), Public Financial Management and Reform Unit (PFMRU) and the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) were each technically assigned to a relevant government ministry for coordination purposes. While DecSec was in the local government ministry, LGFD, PFMRU and the PIU were all located at the Ministry of Finance (Kargbo, 2009).

The project had an initial life span of five years (2004-2009) at the end of which all its departments and staff were to be mainstreamed to their respective line ministries (Fanthorpe et al., 2011). This was accomplished for the three units mainstreamed into the finance ministry, but not for DecSec.<sup>345</sup> Part of the problem confronting the mainstreaming of DecSec is the huge pay differential between its employees and those of its supervisory ministry: the director of local government in the local government and rural development ministry receives about \$500 per month, yet his DecSec

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<sup>344</sup> Interview with a senior Director in the Ministry of Education – Freetown (August, 2014)

<sup>345</sup> Interview with the Director of DecSec, Freetown (August, 2014).

counterpart receives about \$3,000.<sup>346</sup> Considering the pay gap between the two categories of employees, there is no incentive to integrate DecSec into the ministry while the pay differential remains unaddressed.<sup>347</sup> However, a senior public bureaucrat argued that the challenge of integrating DecSec into the local government ministry is not one of money, but of power and connection:

The current financial secretary was heavily involved in the formation of the IRCBP. Besides, most of the IRCBP staff members were formerly employees of the finance ministry. When the project finished in 2011, it was a matter of relocating his boys back to base after a long trek ...If there is money to pay LGFD and PFMRU staff, why is there no money to pay DecSec employees? It has never been about money, it is about who you know, that can pull strings at a higher level.<sup>348</sup>

From the beginning of the decentralisation project, the local government ministry was not only seen as too close to politics, but was also perceived to be staffed by old, ineffective and unproductive civil servants, unfit for the new dispensation.<sup>349</sup> Unfortunately, the marginalisation of the local government ministry in Sierra Leone's decentralisation project appears to be typical of the state of affairs for local government ministries in sub-Saharan Africa. Mamdani (2005:7), for instance, made this appalling observation of the local government ministry in Uganda:

The single most enduring impression I carried away with me was how different the Ministry of Local Government was from every other ministry that I knew of. Every line ministry—be it education, finance, agriculture, industry, or health—was functionally specific except for one, the Ministry of Local Government. Its concerns included primary—but not secondary—education, feeder—but not major—roads, primary—but not hospital—health, and so on. .... I realised that this was the ministry for peasants.

Despite their vital role in the decentralisation process, none of the institutions created under the Bank-funded IRCBP intervention have any legal basis under the LGA. The Bank, however, was able to exercise its influence to use the IRCBP and its departments as surrogates to bypass the legally established decentralisation institutions. Some of the surrogate institutions have established good working relationships with their parent ministries, while others are yet to do so. While the relationship between DecSec and its parent ministry has been adversarial and less cooperative, other institutions have done

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<sup>346</sup> Interview with the Director of Local Government, MLGRD, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>347</sup> Interview with the Director of Local Government, MLGRD, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>348</sup> Interview with a serving permanent secretary in the civil service, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>349</sup> Interview with a senior political science lecturer – University of Sierra Leone, Freetown (June, 2015).

better; LGFD, PFMRU and PIU, for example, found a home at the finance ministry where their personnel have been fully integrated and empowered to manage and lead fiscal decentralisation and donor project management. It is important to note that the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) played a crucial role in the development of the IRCBP concept in partnership with the Bank's project expatriates, partly because the top bureaucrats within the MoFED are mostly graduates of neo-classical economics – similar to the so-called 'Chicago Boys' of Latin America, trained by neoliberal economists such as Milton Friedman from the University of Chicago to lead free-market economic principles in Latin American countries such as Chile, Argentina and Brazil (Steger and Roy, 2010:100) – and understand the language and direction of the Bank. As a former employee of the IRCBP argues, the Bank's understanding of decentralisation was about 'fiscal discipline and prudent public financial management', and the promotion of economic growth, ideas which resonate with the training and work ethos of top bureaucrats of MoFED (Kargbo, 2009:18).

The position of importance attached to MoFED by the World Bank – as opposed to its local government counterpart – demonstrates the neoclassical economics camaraderie between the two, a situation that has proved to be a continuing source of tension between the two ministries and their employees:

The councils have no respect for the local government ministry... because we don't dish out money to them. Apart from the CLoGPAS and DecSec's resident technical facilitator, councils do not report to either DecSec or to the ministry ... They send their reports directly to the LGFD. Neither the ministry nor DecSec is informed if and when financial transfers are made to the councils. It is only in Sierra Leone that the agency responsible for local government finance is not under the local government ministry and transfers are made to councils without reference to the local government ministry.<sup>350</sup>

In what some might call a desperate move by the local government ministry to assert its authority, the national decentralisation policy (Government of Sierra Leone, 2010:10) provides that that the 'LGFD shall be based in the ministry responsible for local government' while it continues to discharge its local government finance management responsibilities. Although the status quo persists, the possibility of LGFD moving to local government and the uncertainties about the reorganisation of fiscal devolution in Sierra Leone creates an unsettling effect for both the LGFD and its employees. In the meantime, DecSec continues to provide non-financial capacity oversight for local

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<sup>350</sup> Interview with the Director of Local Government, MLGRD, Freetown (August, 2014).

councils, the LGFD manages the financial aspects of decentralisation and the local government ministry deals with chiefdom administration, land and other traditional issues at the local level.

### *8.3.1 National-Level Statutory Decentralisation Institutions*

Outside the non-statutory decentralisation institutions such as those created under the Bank's decentralisation project, the LGA created three main institutions to provide management and financial oversight responsibilities for local councils (LGA, 2004). Central among them is the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC), created by Section 35 of the LGA (2004), with the responsibility for providing human resource regulatory and management performance functions for local councils. Under the provisions of the Act, the LGSC was supposed to be an independent commission, working closely with the Human Resources Management Office (HRMO) to provide specialised HR management support to local councils.<sup>351</sup> However, part of the political class' commitment to control local councils, the LGSC, has been the least capacitated and the least productive of the statutory agencies created by LGA (Searle, 2008). The commission has no staff of its own as all its employees were seconded from the HRMO: and, with all its commissioners being retired political appointees loyal to the ruling APC party, the commission's authority is under serious erosion, with low productivity, donor confidence and funding.<sup>352</sup>

However, the dysfunctional nature of the LGSC did not come about by chance; it was deliberately orchestrated by the political class as a way of controlling local resources and decision-making through control of the councils' human resources. The commission's lack of capacity – in addition to increased political interference – means that it cannot deliver on its key responsibilities. For instance, its most recent HR manual for local councils was produced in 2010 and, at the time of field research (May-June, 2015)), the commission has only produced two annual reports since its establishment in 2005 (one in 2009 and other in 2013), despite its mandate to produce annual progress reports and to update HR manuals bi-annually (LGA, 2004). With a broken vehicle, unpredictable funding, poor records management and continued usurpation of its functions by the local government ministry, the role of the LGSC in Sierra Leone's decentralisation landscape is gradually becoming irrelevant. As part of its strategic reorganization

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<sup>351</sup> Interview with a senior officer in the Human Resources Management Office (HRMO) Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>352</sup> Interview with the Executive Secretary of the LGSC, Freetown (August, 2014).

process, the local government ministry has proposed transforming the LGSC into a local government human resources directorate. Such a plan will certainly have legal implications if the LGA (2004) is not amended to make such changes legal.

The Local Government Finance Committee (LGFC) has a similar predicament to that of the LGSC. The LGFC was created by the LGA with a mandate to make recommendations to MoFED on the grant allocations to local councils, indicating the formula used to arrive at such recommendations (LGA 2004:32). Like the LGSC, members of the local government finance committee are mostly political appointees and rarely knowledgeable about public financial management or local government administration. For instance, the northern region representative in the LGFC is an APC party member who failed in his bid for the party's nomination to contest the councillorship elections in Port Loko.<sup>353</sup> The implication of all these incompetent political actions is that the actual grant distribution formula and resource allocation to local councils is done by LGFD technocrats of the ministry of finance, and then validated by the signature of the chairman of the local government finance committee.

Section 109(1) of the LGA (2004) provides for the establishment of an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on decentralisation, chaired by the Vice President, with the ministers responsible for local government, finance, education, agriculture, health, infrastructure, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, and four local council representatives from each of the four regions of the country as members. Its key function is to oversee the implementation of the Act, including the promotion of 100% devolution and arbitration of disputes. The role of the Vice President as IMC chairman was designed to provide political leadership capable of enforcing compliance with the devolution commitments.<sup>354</sup> However, while the IMC was active during the early years of decentralisation (2004-2007), the situation changed thereafter and worsened in 2012 with the appointment of a new local government minister who had a fractured relationship with the then Vice President.<sup>355</sup>

The Local Government Minister, whose ministry hosts the IMC secretariat, was openly unwilling to organise IMC meetings – to be chaired by the Vice President – for nearly five years. Interestingly, both the former Vice President and the Local Government Minister are indigenes of Kono district and senior members of the ruling APC party,

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<sup>353</sup> Interview with a senior economist, attached to the LGFD, Ministry of Finance (September, 2014).

<sup>354</sup> Interview with the Director of DecSec, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>355</sup> Interview with the Director of DecSec, Freetown (August, 2014).

‘who became open enemies, such that the political leadership envisaged by the creation of the IMC became a public mockery’.<sup>356</sup> The extent of political division within the APC party, and its subsequent impact on local government became clearer to the public on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2015, when the newly appointed Vice President, Victor Foh (appointed following the sacking of former Vice President, Samuel Sam Sumana by President Ernest Koroma) chaired the first IMC meeting (organised by the MLGRD) in nearly five years, (Sierra Leone Telegraph, 26 June 2015). It can be seen, therefore, that the creation of seemingly autonomous and technocratic institutions can be instrumentalised to serve political purposes by under-capacitating them or setting them on a collision course with each other, to control and manipulate their functions.

### *8.3.2 Local-Level Statutory Decentralisation Institutions*

The chamber of councillors – one of the statutory local institutions created under section 4(1) of the LGA – consists of not less than 12 councillors per council, elected by universal adult suffrage from among the ordinarily residents of a locality. Although the LGA provides that ‘a person seeking to be an elected councillor should present himself to the electorate as candidate of a political party or as an independent candidate’ (LGA, 2004:5), popular public opinion in the pre-local councils’ legislative consultations was in favour of a non-partisan local council chamber. However, both the SLPP and the APC preferred a system in which political parties could be active players.<sup>357</sup> The electoral compromise that emerged led to over 96% of candidates nominated by political parties; in the 2008 local council elections for instance, being elected (of a total of 456 councillors elected countrywide).<sup>358</sup>

This section argues that the dominance of party-nominated councillors in the local government system is partly a failure of the institutional technicism of Sierra Leone’s decentralisation project, encouraged by a donor-led urgency to drive governance reform after the war (Srivastava and Larizza, 2011; Mbawa, 2012). This led to enormous challenges for true local representation and had local public service delivery implications, both in terms of the quality of the elected representatives and their genuine commitment to public service delivery.

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<sup>356</sup> Interview with civil society and governance activist, Freetown (July, 2015)

<sup>357</sup> Interview with the Director of DecSec, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>358</sup> See National Electrical Commission website [http://www.nec-sierraleone.org/index\\_files/Local\\_Council/20080718\\_WinningCouncillors.pdf](http://www.nec-sierraleone.org/index_files/Local_Council/20080718_WinningCouncillors.pdf) (accessed 12/08/2015).

The Sierra Leonean public's near-religious attachment to political parties and the strong machinery of resource mobilisation at their disposal gave party-approved candidates a huge advantage over independent candidates, as a retired secondary school principal recalled:

After 40 years of public service, I wanted to serve as an independent councillor – free from traditional political party loyalty. I lost by a big margin to a former student of mine... He was the candidate of the dominant political party in the area.<sup>359</sup>

However, the characteristics of elected councillors presented a challenge unique to district councils as opposed to city councils. City councils – partly because of their cosmopolitan nature – can attract a wide variety of both experienced and enthusiastic candidates to stand as city councillors. In district councils – which are less cosmopolitan and have limited amenities – most of the councillors are illiterate and live in communities far removed from the district headquarters town where the activities of the district council are based. According to one former local council CA, over '70% of the second and third crop of councillors in the Port Loko District Council cannot understand council documents written in English', limiting their contribution during council deliberations, 'despite the fact that council meetings are conducted in the local language'.<sup>360</sup> In addition, party-sponsored councillors in rural communities are 'usually the "yes-men" of their political parties, such that council deliberations and eventual decisions are determined by the executive hierarchy of their parties'.<sup>361</sup> The structure of political representation at the local level – strongly influenced by party politics – challenges the decentralisation promise of proximity and allocative efficiency and also enhances the possibility of the transfer of local level decision-making authority from elected local representatives to national level officials of political parties – removed from the daily needs and challenges of local communities (Faguet, 2000; Barankay and Lockwood, 2006). A cross-council analysis of the profile of the third batch of councillors (2012-2016) among the four councils in this study lends credence to the capacity gap in district councils. In Bo City for instance, all 13 councillors have at least senior secondary school level qualifications and two have postgraduate qualifications. In Port Loko district, however, over half of its councillors have no formal schooling beyond the primary school level; none have graduate level qualifications, and those with post-secondary qualifications account for less than 20%.

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<sup>359</sup> Interview a failed local council elections contestant, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>360</sup> Interview with a former CA of Port Loko District Council, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>361</sup> Interview with a former CA of Port Loko District Council, Makeni City (July, 2015).

Returning to the thesis' argument in section 7.3.0 on the local level power struggle between chiefs and councils, section 20(1) of the LGA (2004:16) describes local councils as 'the highest political authority in their locality and [they] shall have legislative and executive powers...in promoting the development and welfare of people in their locality'. Although the exercise of such powers was designed to support councils in their core function of local public service delivery, in many instances it has become a source of conflict among local governance actors. Councils' service delivery functions include the provision of oversight functions on chieftdom councils through the approval and supervision of their annual budgets and expenses. This supervisory function of councils over chieftdom administrations led to power struggles between councillors and paramount chiefs to the extent that the Council of Paramount Chiefs in Sierra Leone, made a petition to the President, requesting the transfer of their supervisory functions from local councils to the hitherto suspended role of District Officer: they described the councillors as 'disrespectful to chiefs and usurping chieftaincy authority and functions'.<sup>362</sup> As political heads of local councils, mayors and chairpersons supervise council activities as well as acting as the principal signatory of council accounts. This coordination and supervisory role vested in councils' political heads in local service delivery has, in many instances, led to undemocratic tendencies, including less consultative and collaborative actions in local decision-making processes.

As one councillor noted: 'the mayor has a cabal of councillors and core staff he delegates and consults with on all major decisions of the council... And those of us outside his cabal are labelled as traitors'.<sup>363</sup> The political nature of local representation in the decentralisation institutional process failed to transfer true power and authority to local people to own and determine their development destinies as envisaged in the decentralisation promise (Barankay and Lockwood, 2006), as the decentralisation reality, essentially a political one, runs contrary to its donor presentation as a technical process (Bangura and Larbi, 2006; Therkildesen, 2006).

### *8.3.3 Local Participation: The Ward Development Committees (WDCs)*

The hub of local participatory democracy in Sierra Leone's decentralisation is the ward development committee (WDC) – the mundane space designed to provide equal gender representation, community participation and oversight roles in public service delivery. The main functions of the WDCs include the mobilisation of community effort for

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<sup>362</sup> Interview with a DO who was a former CA in one of the councils, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>363</sup> Interview with a councillor at Kenema City Council, Kenema City (May, 2015).

local self-help development, service delivery planning and oversight, and civic education and sensitisation (LGA, 2004:46). This section argues that the participatory role of WDCs falls short of full involvement; the idea of participation in rural development has long been criticised for romanticising rural communities as the agency of the common people and the rural poor, whose voices have been generalised to justify bureaucratic decisions in the name of community ownership. Cooke and Kothari (2001) have cynically referred to the so-called emancipatory potentials of participation as the ‘new tyranny’ that celebrates the community regardless of repeated calls to recognise the multiplicity of local and individual realities (Williams, 2004). Frances Cleaver (2001:46) aptly described this idealisation of participation when she wrote:

Development practitioners excel in perpetuating the myth that communities are capable of anything, all that is required is sufficient mobilization (through institutions) and the latent capacities of the community will be unleashed in the interests of development.

In reality, Sierra Leone’s decentralisation project has produced the antithesis of the genuine community participation anticipated in the creation of the WDCs. In many localities, councillors have manipulated section 96(2) of the LGA (2004:46-7) – which provides that ‘one of the ward councillors shall be elected to chair meetings of ward committees... [and] shall be responsible for presenting committee recommendations and proposals to the local council’ – to suggest that councillors are in full control of the WDCs, including their membership composition.<sup>364</sup> With the dominance of political party-sponsored candidates, the process of electing ward committee members has been hijacked by the councillors. In nine out of the ten wards analysed in this study, all the ward committee members were either active members of the party of the councillor or in some way sympathetic to it. However, in one of the wards in Bo City Council, one ward member who happens not to be a member of the party of the councillor, said he was chosen because there was ‘no choice’; because of his status as a popular civil society activist, ‘it would appear too odd’ for him not to have been considered for membership.<sup>365</sup>

However, unlike councillors who receive monthly sitting fees, WDC members are not remunerated. In district councils with vast swathes of geographical coverage, the cost of transportation to attend ward meetings can mean sacrificing an income equivalent to a day’s family meal: ‘that is too much a demand for impoverished people like us’, stated a

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<sup>364</sup> Interview with the former mayor of Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

<sup>365</sup> Interview with a WDC member in the Bo City Council, Bo City (June, 2015).

ward committee member.<sup>366</sup> In acknowledgment of these participatory challenges in local governance, the LGFD included a transportation and capacity support allowance for ward committees in its 2010 budget allocation to councils. Unfortunately, this budget line has been inconsistent, and is on the decline in councils' budgetary allocations. When there are budget constraints, noted a local council finance officer, 'the first budget item the finance ministry will delete from council allocation is the ward development committee facilitation grant'.<sup>367</sup>

In all the four councils in this study, there were problems ranging from irregular meetings to lack of support for ward committee activities and inconsistency between official WDC decisions and those forwarded to the council by the councillors. A former CA affirmed:

In some cases, we've had to send staff representatives into ward committee meetings to verify councillors' reports, as there were several instances of misrepresentation of local needs and development priorities from the WDCs by the councillors.<sup>368</sup>

Such challenges bring into question whether the role of participation as the agency for depoliticising local development initiatives can continue to hold true if it masks critical nuances of gender, tribe and political affiliation. The attempt to depoliticise rural development and political process creates structural barriers and constraints, leading to political exclusion and fractured identities (Moore and Putzel, 1999). As David Mosse (2001; 2004; 2014) argues, the politicisation of the local level participation suggests there is no altruistic apolitical class of benevolent locals; everyone is an embedded structure and institution that serves an interest.

#### *8.3.4 Devolved Sector: Primary Health*

The Local Government Act (LGA) provides for the transfer of the existing structures, resources, personnel and equipment from central government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) to local councils. The LGA identified 80 functions in 17 MDAs for devolution with the health and education sectors being the most affected.<sup>369</sup> This section argues that even before the formal declaration of decentralisation in 2004, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) had a long history of deconcentrated health service delivery which began when Sierra Leone subscribed to the Alma Ata Declaration

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<sup>366</sup> Interview with WDC member in Masiaka Town, Port Loko District (April, 2015).

<sup>367</sup> Interview with a local council Finance Officer, Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>368</sup> Interview with a former CA of Port Loko District Council local council, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>369</sup> Interview with the Monitoring and Evaluation Manager of DecSec, Freetown (August, 2014).

of 1978 which ‘strongly reaffirms health care as a fundamental human right’ (WHO, 1978:2). The section further argues that the devolution of primary health care to local councils without a corresponding transfer of the requisite human resource capacity to monitor and evaluate progress dilutes specialist knowledge (especially in professional public services such as health care delivery) and promotes a culture of competition among local councils, devolved sectors and development NGOs in local public service delivery.

To mainstream the provisions of the Alma Ata Declaration, Sierra Leone developed a national health policy in 1993 which prioritised primary health care (PHC) as the core component of the country’s national health delivery system; and defines PHC as:

Essential health care based on scientifically-sound and socially acceptable methods of technology, made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community, through their full participation, and at a cost the community and country can afford to maintain at every stage of their development in the spirit of self-reliance and self-determination. (MoHS, 2004:6)

From the health ministry’s perspective, primary health care provision was anchored in the principles of equitable access, community involvement and ownership, with a focus on disease prevention and control, use of appropriate technology, and a multi-sector approach in health care delivery. To achieve these core principles, the MoHS was restructured at the national level, with the creation of a Directorate of Primary Health Care to oversee the integrated primary health care delivery programmes and to lead, manage and supervise the first point of contact between citizens and the country’s health service delivery system across the country.<sup>370</sup>

At the district (local) level, primary health care is managed by a District Health Management Team (DHMT) headed by a District Medical Officer (DMO) responsible for disease surveillance and prevention, health data collection, equipping, training and supervising health workers, and the general health budget management (MoHS, 2012). Each DHMT consists of a chain of Peripheral Health Units (PHUs),<sup>371</sup> ranked in order of their facilities, staff complement, and population coverage and health service delivery expectations.<sup>372</sup> Each unit is designed to provide a set of health services concomitant to its capacity, staff expertise and facilities.

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<sup>370</sup> Interview with the Director of PHC, MoHS, Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>371</sup> The general name for all local health service delivery units outside the main referral hospitals.

<sup>372</sup> Interview with a district health statistician, Kenema City (May, 2015).

The promise and justification for transferring powers to locally elected officials was to utilise local knowledge to prioritise public service based on local needs (Litvack et al., 1998; Willis et al., 1999; Faguet, 2000). However, local health service delivery continued to be challenged in its attempts to provide the required services by a lack of both equipment and staff. This is partly because ‘the central government is resistant to devolution, due to a culture of accumulation, lack of coordination and limited accountability for frontline health workers’ (Conteh, 2016:1). But fundamentally, the institutional arrangement of decentralisation allows for significant powers and resources to be controlled and managed at the centre, and whilst a number of service delivery functions were devolved, the required resource mobilisation and distribution authority remain centralised.<sup>373</sup> In the remote riverine chiefdom of Sanda-Magbolothor in the Port Loko district, for instance, PHUs operate in makeshift structures and squalid rooms in private homes, and some Maternal and Child Health (MCH) centres do not meet the health ministry’s staffing standards as the health sector human resource remained highly centralised.

As part of the decentralisation process, the entire primary health care division of the MoHS was slated for devolution, and since in 2004 the local health service delivery has improved impressively since then. In 2010, for instance, following a presidential visit to devolved health facilities in Bo, the President was so impressed by the standards in council-managed clinics, that he ‘decided to entrust the management of tertiary hospitals to local councils’.<sup>374</sup> Since tertiary hospitals were not part of the functions slated for devolution, the President’s decision to transfer their management to local councils was one of delegation rather than devolution. Although tertiary hospitals returned to MoHS control in 2013, the decision to bring them under local councils in the first place was fraught with institutional and management challenges. Firstly, whilst the District Medical Officer (DMO) is, in principle, the chief administrator for health services at the district level and the contact point between the DHMT and the local councils, in practice, there is no clear-cut managerial relationship between the DMO and the Medical Superintendent – the senior clinical doctor in each district hospital.<sup>375</sup> Administratively, the DMO is line-managed by the Director of Primary Health while the Medical Superintendent is supervised by the Director of Hospitals and Laboratories.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Interview with the DMO of Port Loko District, Port Loko Town (September, 2014).

<sup>374</sup> Interview with the Director of Primary Health Care, MoHS, Freetown (August, 2014).

<sup>375</sup> Interview with DMO of Kenema District, Kenema City (May, 2015).

<sup>376</sup> Interview with DMO of Kenema District, Kenema City (May, 2015).

Bringing the two administratively separate structures under the purview of the local councils – who lacked both the specialist expertise and staff managerial responsibilities over the devolved sectors, has been one of the biggest challenges to public health service delivery at the local level:

If you have a medical superintendent, that is a specialist doctor with long years of experience; it is difficult for the DMO to exercise full control over him/her, especially when a good number of the DMOs are recent graduates who have just completed their post-MD qualification in public health.<sup>377</sup>

Local council authorities without professional medical expertise are caught up in a supremacy contest between two health professionals, as evidenced by a serious fracas in December 2013, between the DMO and the Medical Superintendent in Kenema City.<sup>378</sup> But most significantly, councils are also caught in a dilemma of coordination and competition for resources with development NGOs who receive donor money for health service delivery functions considered the responsibility of local councils and the respective DHMTs in the localities in which they operate. Most often, these NGOs implement health-related activities without reference to either the council(s) or the DHMTs in their operational areas. Unfortunately, the on-going donor lack of trust in government functionaries suggests that it is the NGOs – both in the short and long term – that will be the main conduits for health service delivery in rural Sierra Leone.

In addition, the health ministry has also centralised the procurement of essential drugs and equipment, justifying its action as an attempt to curb corruption and reduce waste (MoHS, 2012). Outside this official narrative, many observers refused to believe that the real reason for taking back tertiary hospitals from local councils could be unconnected with the quest for personal financial gain by top public officials. ‘The Health Minister and the Director of Hospitals and Laboratories’, noted one senior medical personnel, wanted to ‘control the huge cleaning and construction contracts in the health system strengthening initiative following the introduction of the Free Health Care Initiative (FHCI) in 2010.’<sup>379</sup>

However, mismanagement and waste in the health sector management remain a serious problem. In a report by a civil society group, the Health for All Coalition (2011), regarding the distribution of free health care drugs from the central medical stores to

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<sup>377</sup> Interview with DMO of Kenema District, Kenema City (May, 2015).

<sup>378</sup> Interview with a senior local council staff member, Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>379</sup> Interview with a District Medical Officer, Freetown, (May, 2015).

DHMTs between May and October 2011, it was noted that of the 610,342 tablets of essential drugs supplied to Bo district, only 553,281 were delivered. Somewhere along the distribution chain the drugs were captured by a crooked syndicate of powerful politicians, top civil servants and health workers. As a health care worker acknowledged, it is not unusual for health officials in PHUs to receive and sign for drugs – on the instruction of their DMOs – that are usually missing 30-40% of the expected delivery quantity from the central medical stores on the ‘assumption that PHU staff will misappropriate the drugs, therefore, the DHMTs take their own share in advance’.<sup>380</sup> In the meantime, the much anticipated liberalisation and marketisation of the health sector push forward by the World Bank (through a health insurance scheme) is yet to materialise – apart from the proliferation of private clinics and hospitals in big cities, such as Freetown, Bo, Kenema and Makeni.<sup>381</sup>

Health systems across the world are in search of ‘better ways of regulating, financing and delivering health services’ in an efficient and sustainable manner that meets the health needs of the world’s growing population (Londono and Frenk 1997:2). For Sierra Leone’s health ministry, functional coherence – ‘the correlation between staff skills, available equipment and facilities and the main health problems to be tackled’ (MoHS 2004:34) – was one of the ministry’s preferred approaches to health service delivery. Unfortunately, this is still an aspiration for Sierra Leone’s health service; one DMO points to the 2013 Ebola outbreak as a testament to the catastrophic failure of a poorly trained and inadequate health care delivery infrastructure across the country:

When the Ebola struck, health workers had no previous knowledge on how to handle Ebola patients; Kenema district had only one old ambulance, hospitals lacked basic facilities for infection prevention and control...We ventured into the land of the unknown, and unfortunately, health workers, over 30 of them in Kenema, paid the ultimate price, death.<sup>382</sup>

Such is the scale of the institutional and management capacity challenges that were transferred to local councils struggling to properly situate the institution of local government in a political landscape emerging from three decades of centralisation, and without the resources, authority and specialist knowledge necessary to drive reform and deliver local services.

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<sup>380</sup> Interview with Community Health Officer, Port Loko Town (July, 2015).

<sup>381</sup> See section 5.3.2.

<sup>382</sup> Interview with DMO of Kenema District, Kenema City (May, 2015).

### *8.3.5 Devolved Sector: Basic Education*

Government's interests and incentives in funding and setting out the governance and supervisory framework of education in Sierra Leone are rooted in the post-colonial state-led development model which positioned the state as the provider of social services necessary for socio-economic development (Bangura and Larbi 2006). Support to education is therefore both a social and political goal of the state. In 1993, Sierra Leone introduced the 6-3-3-4 system of education in line with its counterparts in the West African Examinations Council (WAEC),<sup>383</sup> thus parting with its post-colonial education model (World Bank, 2007). As the name implies, the 6-3-3-4 system provides for six years of primary (7-12), three years of junior secondary (13-15), three years of senior secondary (16-18) and four (19-22) years of university/tertiary education. The first nine years of schooling constitute the country's compulsory basic education system. Under the decentralisation programme, the entire basic education component alongside its key activities such as school supervision, procurement and distribution of teaching and learning materials (TLMs), payment of school fees subsidies and public examination fees, maintenance of school structures and the supervision of district and city libraries, among others, was to be devolved to local councils.<sup>384</sup> This section argues that the education sector, like its health counterpart, was already largely deconcentrated and the transfer of basic education service delivery functions to local councils without the necessary resources and oversight authority – especially for devolved employees – led to accountability and management oversight challenges at the local level.

Whilst significant functions were devolved to local councils, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) retained control over major policy and financial issues, leading to a lack of clarity on the exact role of local councils in basic education service delivery. At the district level, the MEST already had deconcentrated education inspectorate offices, responsible for education supervision and oversight before decentralisation was introduced (Fanthorpe et al., 2011). Each district office is managed by a Deputy Director of Education (DDE) whose functions include the supervision, coordination and oversight of all educational institutions and facilities in the district.<sup>385</sup> Under the provisions of the LGA, the entire cadre of teacher supervisors – responsible for school and teacher supervision and data collection – were supposed to physically

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<sup>383</sup> The regional body that conducts and validates public examinations in the English-speaking West African countries of Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone and The Gambia.

<sup>384</sup> See SI 13 of the LGA (2004).

<sup>385</sup> Interview with the Deputy Director of Education- Bombali District, Makeni City (September, 2014)

operate from the offices of their respective local councils in line with the principle of subsidiarity and local service delivery (Litvack et al., 1998; Willis et al., 1999; Faguet, 2000; Blank 2009). As at the end of 2015, no teacher supervisor has done so. From the education ministry's perspective, councils are yet to provide the enabling space for the full integration of devolved sector staff and lack the necessary capacity – the new part of speech in Sierra Leone's devolution landscape, used loosely as an excuse for service delivery failure and unwillingness of public bureaucrats to devolve – to provide the necessary management oversight and support for the teacher supervisors 'smooth integration into the councils' workforce.<sup>386</sup> In Bo City Council for instance, some teacher supervisors were temporarily relocated to the council's offices, but later returned to the district education office, claiming that they had not been provided with office space, were not invited to council staff meetings and lacked the required material and technical support for routine school supervision.<sup>387</sup> The challenges councils' faces in public service delivery go beyond capacity issues; they include central issues of authority, autonomy and resources. 'It is a familiar practice', noted a local council official in Bo, 'for heads of MDAs to travel to Freetown without informing the council...putting a hold on local service delivery efforts'.<sup>388</sup>

One of the major responsibilities of the district education office is the collection and analysis of education-related data at the district level. Data collection and analysis is managed by the Directorate of Planning and Policy Development, while the District Education Office – the focal point of MEST at the district level – is line-managed by the Director of Inspectorate. Unfortunately, the two directorates rarely synergise their activities which accounts, in part, for the lack of a comprehensive data collection and analysis at the district level, and makes the production of comparable data on similar indicators across districts a near impossibility.<sup>389</sup>

In terms of local human resources, each district education office should be staffed at minimum, by a Deputy Director and an assistant, one Senior Inspector, two Inspectors and eight Teacher Supervisors. All the district education offices in this study apart from Bo face serious staff constraints and the devolution of basic education has not

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<sup>386</sup> Interview with a senior staff of MEST – Freetown (August, 2014)

<sup>387</sup> Interview with a Teacher Supervisor attached to the Bo District Education Office, Bo City (July, 2015).

<sup>388</sup> Interview with the Development Planning Officer, Bo District Council, Bo City (May, 2015).

<sup>389</sup> As part of this study, the researcher requested data for the same indicators across the four case study councils. In all four district education offices, different data was collected for the same indicators and all used different methods.

improved the situation because councils do not have HR responsibility over devolved sector employees – a situation neatly summarised by a devolved sector staff member in the Bombali district education office:

The entire District Education Office has only one Inspector and two Teacher Supervisors... We are massively constrained and cannot do our supervisory and data collection work properly or on time... Unfortunately, it is Freetown that posts staff to the district offices, not the councils.<sup>390</sup>

Since 2013, a culture of recentralisation has been emerging in the education sector – despite the Hill Valley Declaration committing decentralisation stakeholders to full-scale devolution by December 2016 – leading to questions on what is really devolved to local councils within the education sector. Such claims are underpinned by the joint decision of the ministries of finance and education to pay school fees subsidies and public examination fees directly to schools and the examinations board, bypassing local councils. The education ministry justified its action on the basis of fiscal efficiency and tackling misappropriation of public funds. During the 2012 grant allocation, five councils used the school fees subsidies for other activities, leading to unusual delays in the payment of school fee subsidies and subsequent threat of strike action by school authorities. ‘When there is a strike action, the public blames the central government, not the councils’, argues the education ministry.<sup>391</sup> Based on an economies of scale argument (Silberston, 1972), MEST had earlier centralised the procurement of teaching aids, without seeking the opinion and contribution of local councils. However, council authorities have described the ministry’s economies of scale argument as a smokescreen to mask its ‘grip on power and resources’.<sup>392</sup> Such concerns resonate with the challenges of public procurement in the developing world which is highly susceptible to corruption because of the combination of vast sums of money spent by government, a high rate of discretionary powers of politicians and public bureaucrats, and the difficulty in detecting and investigating potential and/or actual corrupt practices (Appolloni and Nshombo, 2013).

Local level education service delivery is further constrained by centralisation of teacher recruitment and approval of new schools. Councils are of the opinion that, because of their proximity and local knowledge, the recruitment of teachers and approval of new

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<sup>390</sup> Interview with senior staff member of the Bombali district education office, Makeni City (July, 2015).

<sup>391</sup> Interview with the Minister of Education Science and Technology, Freetown (September, 2014).

<sup>392</sup> Interview with a senior local government staff member, Kenema City (June, 2015).

schools ought to be under their purview to prevent situations leading to the reckless abandon of public facilities like the one observed by a councillor in Kenema:

We [councillors] have identified three new school structures built with government money in three villages in the Gorama Mende Chiefdom in the Kenema district with no teachers...The volunteer teachers have left the school as they are not on the government payroll, whilst the neighbouring village has a government-approved school operating in a temporary building under a mango tree.<sup>393</sup>

The desire of politicians to appear to be doing tangible development projects, as in the common notion of ‘bringing development to the people’ through physical projects such as schools and hospitals, makes the construction of physical projects a political decision rather than one based on need.<sup>394</sup> Such challenges in the coordination and decision-making processes permeate the decentralisation landscape, leading local authorities to wonder if the education sector really is decentralised when MEST controls over 90% of the education budget by retaining control of teachers’ salaries, school fee subsidies and examination fees and is the authority over devolved staff, including the recruitment of teachers and the approval of new schools. In its 2013 CLoGPAS report, DecSec identified asymmetric power relations and coordination challenges between MDAs and councils as one of the main limitations to public service delivery and effective devolution in Sierra Leone’s decentralisation project.

#### **8.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the model and institutional arrangements of decentralisation in Sierra Leone, in line with the preferences and motivations of its various actors. It attempted, in a detailed and critical analysis, to answer the thesis’ sub-research question four, about the extent to which Sierra Leone’s decentralisation model was a product of an externally-led neoliberal governance reform agenda, or of local political interests. It also provides insights into some of the complexities of the decentralisation institutional arrangements, and service delivery planning and coordination and their implications for the nature and quality of public services in Sierra Leone. It problematises the technocratic nature of the Sierra Leone model of decentralisation – especially its HR and financial management processes – and the limitations of institutional preference – over context – in governance reform (Bevir, 2011). From the chapter’s analysis, three main conclusions can be made.

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<sup>393</sup> Interview with a Kenema City Council councillor, Kenema City (June, 2015).

<sup>394</sup> Interview with a civil society activist, Bo City (April, 2015).

Firstly, the chapter demonstrated the lack of universality in the notion of ‘international actors’ as there is no shared philosophy among donor partners on how the peace building and governance reform process should be constructed and prioritised. The Sierra Leone case demonstrates the huge philosophical variation among donors, who can be easily grouped under labels such as ‘international development partners’, ‘the UN family’ and ‘international financial institutions’ (IFIs).

Secondly, the chapter highlighted how certain expressions of international development management – such as donor-led, and donor-driven – can be naïve and misleading as they significantly mask the influence of local actors. Sierra Leone’s decentralisation model was externally driven as it was locally led. The government’s insistence on ensuring chieftaincy representation and political party participation, for instance, demonstrated that decentralisation does not exist in a vacuum, and that it is susceptible to political influence and maneuvering against both donors’ and citizens’ preference for non-partisan local councils.

Finally, the chapter also highlighted the contradictions and challenges of institutional preference over political economy considerations in post-war governance reform in the developing world that presents governance as a technical project, rather than one of politics and compromise. The challenges of mainstreaming DecSec, relative to LGFD, for instance, the lack of capacity support within the LGSC, and the usurpation of its functions by the local government ministry demonstrate some of the dangers of creating and cherry-picking governance institutions. The lack of synergy between DecSec, LGFD and LGSC on the one hand, and between the ministries of finance and local government on the other, in addition to the fact that the IMC did not meet for over five years – until late 2015 – underscores the role of politics in what donors might want to present as technical and bureaucratic functions. At the local level, the increasing usurpation of the functions of the ward development committees by councillors, and the lack of local-level coordination by local public service delivery agencies and oversight by local residents of devolved sectors, hinder local public service delivery efforts and can, adversely, be antithetical to post-war social cohesion.

## Chapter Nine

### Summary Of Key Findings and Concluding Remarks

#### 9.0 Introduction

The thesis analyses the politics of democratic decentralisation in post-war Sierra Leone, and its impact on local public service delivery and social cohesion in a polarised political context with multiple actors and motivations. It provides critical insights into the politics of post-war governance reform and its donor-led institutionalism, and the unexplored relationship between decentralisation and social cohesion in post-war Sierra Leone. The thesis is essentially diagnostic and stops short of providing prescriptions on the preferred mode and structure of decentralisation in Sierra Leone, especially on what a ‘going with the grain’ model would have looked like. However, in every appropriate stage in the analysis the thesis highlights and discusses the preferences of Sierra Leoneans on various components of the decentralisation process. For instance, on local representation, the thesis emphasises the overwhelming preference for a non-partisan local government system over party-nominated candidates, and the need to put a premium on genuinely local representation. On local resource mobilisation, the thesis also emphasises the local preference for more powers to generate resources locally rather than fiscal dependency on the central government. On efforts to promote decentralisation as a conduit for social cohesion, the thesis emphasises clear local preference for an integrated local government system that brings on board institutions, processes of conflict prevention and post-war resettlement on critical issues such as chieftaincy and access to land ownership among others as part of the decentralisation framework.

Chapter One set out the overarching goal and rationale of the study, its research question, sub-questions, the literature gaps and its methodological and ethical considerations. The conceptual and theoretical considerations and the analytical framework of the study were discussed in Chapter Two. Chapter Three presented a background analysis of the case study, including Sierra Leone’s post-independence governance trajectory and its history of centralised authoritarianism; civil war and post-war governance reform priorities, their actors, incentives and motivations; and the provisions and contradictions of the decentralisation legislation, to provide the contextual background against which the decentralisation reforms were planned and implemented.

Based on the annual intergovernmental fiscal transfers and two council management performance assessment toolkits, Chapter Four tested the validity of the party politics affiliation argument and its technocrat reform preference set out in section 1.1 by comparing the political party affiliation of a council's political leadership, the quantum of resources it receives from the central government, and its overall service delivery and management performance ranking. The chapter highlighted the uneven public service delivery outcomes among local councils despite the availability of an acceptable central-local fiscal decentralisation formula. Singling out basic education and primary health care because of their centrality to human wellbeing, Chapters Five and Six identified and discussed changes in public service delivery in these two sectors in the four case-study councils over the first decade (2004-2014) of decentralisation. They also discussed service delivery patterns, and service delivery variations among local councils, proffering alternative explanations for some of the service delivery and management performance differences recorded between pro-government and pro-opposition councils outside the party politics ruling coalition dichotomy and the supposedly neutral donor-led institutional technocratic and formulaic processes of intergovernmental fiscal relations. The two chapters also linked the theoretical and analytical framework (Chapter Two) to the empirical analysis of the Sierra Leonean case study, introducing a context-specific lens to the normative concepts of decentralisation, political affiliation and public service delivery.

Escalating the empirical analyses further, Chapter Seven provided some critical insights into the implications of decentralisation on the almost unexplored territory of social cohesion in a post-war ethnic politicisation context, whilst Chapter Eight explored the institutional arrangement of decentralisation, its implications for the contextual realities of governance and social relations and the extent to which Sierra Leone's decentralisation model was the product of an externally-influenced governance reform initiative. Chapter Nine sums up the thesis and discusses its empirical findings and conclusions. It draws evidence from the empirical chapters to highlight the relevance of the research, how it addresses the research questions and its wider theoretical contributions.

The four main empirical chapters individually and collectively contribute to answering the four sub-questions and cumulatively form the building blocks of the answer to the thesis' central research question. Whilst Chapter Five, for instance, answers sub-question one by providing empirical evidence on the nature, progress and challenges of

public service delivery since the commencement of devolution in 2004, Chapter Six answers sub-question two by providing alternative explanations for the service delivery variations among the four case study councils. Chapter Seven answers sub-question three regarding the social cohesion implications of decentralisation reform, whilst Chapter Eight answers sub-question four on the extent to which Sierra Leone's decentralisation model was a product of donor-led neoliberal technocratic institutionalism. Through this careful and thorough political economy engagement of the various actors, issues and variables presented in this study, the thesis provides a uniquely original piece of research grounded in a critical understanding of the local socio-political dynamics that influence public policy choices. The analyses also provide important insights into the relationship between decentralisation and social cohesion, especially the long-term implications of decentralisation on communal networks and bonding, and the changing nature of local power dynamics, motivations, interests and actors in state-society relations and public policy choices.

But to what extent does Sierra Leone's case study contribute to answering the thesis' central research question and shed light on the dynamics of the politics of post-war governance reform in the developing world? How has the case study contributed to filling the research gap on the lack of empirical analytical reviews of decentralisation interventions in sub-Saharan Africa and contributed to theory more broadly? These questions form the basis of the summary of the key findings in the next section.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Following this introductory section, section two pinpoints the research's strength and major contribution to and critique of the existing theoretical body of knowledge – especially its critical insights into the relationship between decentralisation and social cohesion and the limits of donor-led off-the-shelf governance reform preferences. It further summarises the thesis' central argument, indicating how the research has investigated, analysed and provided a better understanding of the thesis' central and sub-questions. The third section sums up the key empirical findings and main conclusions, analysing how and where the thesis has contributed to addressing and filling the identified literature gap. The last section concludes the thesis by underscoring how the overall thesis organisation and analyses address the research's overarching goal.

## **9.1 Decentralisation, Service Delivery and Social Cohesion: Wider Theoretical Contributions**

In section 1.1 of the introductory chapter, the thesis identified a dearth of empirical literature on decentralisation and public service delivery despite the ubiquitous nature of decentralisation initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa (Litvack et al., 1997; Crook and Manor 1998; Ndegwa, 2002; Conyers, 2007). It discussed and problematised the notion of political affiliation, used by international development partners to promote institutional and technocratic priorities over political economy in decentralisation reform interventions, and called for the return of political imperatives into the decentralisation discourse. It also noted the unexplored territory of decentralisation and social cohesion (Scott, 2009), notwithstanding the fact that most decentralisation interventions in sub-Saharan Africa are implemented either as part of peace agreements or post-war governance reform processes (Boone, 2003; Siteo and Hunguana, 2005).

Over a decade down the devolution pathway, Sierra Leone's decentralisation landscape is replete with donor-funded research projects focusing on 'what and how it was done' approaches that prioritise positive correlations between decentralisation and public service delivery (DecSec, 2006, 2008; Zhou, 2009; Srivastava and Larizza, 2011; World Bank, 2014), with limited empirical and political economy-based analytical reviews. This study's context-specific political economy approach – one that brings together the socio-economic and cultural dynamics influencing fiscal relations and public policy choices in Sierra Leone's decentralisation landscape – represents an important analytical shift from the preponderance of donor-led research, as it sheds light on the competing influences of local and international interests and priorities in governance reform processes in the developing world. The thesis highlights and discusses the limits of externally-led reform based on donor best practice within the context of (in many instances) divergent national interests and priorities in local governance. Sierra Leone's empirical case study significantly contributes to compensating for the dearth of empirical analytical reviews of decentralisation interventions in the sub-region; it adds another layer of evidence and an example of an empirical analytical review of decentralisation reform intervention and its implications for public service delivery in sub-Saharan Africa.

Theoretically, this study is diagnostic rather than prescriptive in nature: it does not aim to propose a new body of theory capable of withstanding the test of external validity and/or generalisation on decentralisation and public service delivery in sub-Saharan

Africa. However, in addition to compensating for the gap in analytical reviews of decentralisation and public service delivery in the sub-region, the study provides critical insights into the challenges and limitations of donor-led priorities in the decentralisation reform process in the developing world. By highlighting the incomplete story and faultlines of such donor-led governance reform priorities based on the Sierra Leonean case study, it is hoped that future governance reform intervention in Sierra Leone (and possibly in the sub-region) will focus less on donor-led best practices and incorporate more significant context-specific political economy analysis. Whilst the study does not assume generalisability based on this context-specific analysis, its approach of critically problematising the limits of and preference for donor-led technocratic institutionalism in what is a complex socio-political process, is replicable in similar contexts – especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

Considering the limited body of empirical and theoretical analyses of decentralisation and social cohesion (Scott, 2009), the thesis innovatively (section 2.6) drew from the decentralisation, religious and ethnic minority literatures (Tadros, 2012), together with the substantial body of literature on decentralisation and violent conflict (Brinkerhoff and Mayfield, 2005; Schou and Haugh, 2005; Green, 2008) and the existing body of knowledge on social capital and social cohesion (Coleman, 1990; Fine and Lapavitsas, 2004; Cox, 2009; Jenson 2010), on the premise that violent conflict leads to a breakdown in trust – the foundation of social cohesion. In so doing, the thesis provides critical insights into the mostly unexplored relationship between the decentralisation and social cohesion literatures. This critical insight into the two social phenomena that have evolved separately over time – despite the fact that one (decentralisation) has largely been used as a tool to achieve the other (social cohesion) – represents an important contribution to understanding and explaining why a number of post-war decentralisation initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa have been less successful in achieving their peace building and social cohesion promise (World Bank, 2004; Siteo and Hunguana, 2005; Crawford and Hartman, 2008).

The thesis' critical insights into implications of decentralisation on social cohesion offers both theoretical value and practical contribution to the decentralisation and social cohesion literatures which have previously existed separately, despite the ubiquitous nature of decentralisation in post-war governance reform intervention in sub-Saharan Africa. Based on an approach that brings together both the mainstream and normative decentralisation and social cohesion literatures in a critically integrated application of a

political economy analytical lens, the thesis not only fills the research gap identified in the introductory chapter, it also succinctly answers the central research question: 'how has the politics of democratic decentralisation in post-war Sierra Leone affected service delivery outcomes and their implications for social cohesion in the four local councils of Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Port Loko, since 2004?' This study therefore contributes to theory on three dynamic levels. On the first, it compensates for the dearth of empirical analytical reviews of the decentralisation experience in the developing world, and it does so from the position of local knowledge with first hand contextual experience. On the second level, it provides a critical analytical lens between decentralisation and social cohesion based a political economy analysis. On the third, the thesis problematises the donor-led technocratic and institutionalism preponderance in governance reform processes. It hopes that, by problematising this dominant donor-led governance reform agenda and highlighting its limitations, the study provides a critical analytical insight that can guide researchers, national governments and international development partners, to not only take note of the limits of technocratic institutionalism in governance reform, but to also maximise the use of political economy and other context-specific analytical frameworks in the planning and implementation of post-war governance reform intervention in sub-Saharan Africa.

## **9.2 Sierra Leone Case Study: Summary of Key Findings and Conclusions**

This section summarises the key findings of the research in a synthesised manner, reflecting how they support the thesis' main argument and answer its central and sub-research questions. The promise that decentralisation will bring the decision-making process closer to the people and promote allocative efficiency due to a better understanding and prioritisation of local needs, has propelled the decentralisation revolution in the developing world since the late 1980s (Ahmed et al., 2005; Conyers, 2007; Robinson, 2007; Muriisa, 2008). Based on these theoretical frameworks, the thesis provides an empirical examination of the effect of decentralisation reform on two public service delivery sectors – primary health and basic education – and its overall implications for post-war social cohesion. Guided by one central research question and a set of four sub-questions (as outlined in section 1.2), the thesis contends that donor-led technocratic institutional and formulaic preference in central-local fiscal relations, designed to counter the effect of party politics in decentralisation processes in the developing world, is naïve and short-sighted. It calls for the return of context-specific political economy considerations to the decentralisation reform discourse, arguing that

attempts to de-politicise what is, essentially, a political project undermines the service delivery and social cohesion promise of decentralisation. A thorough analysis of the key empirical findings of and conclusions on the thesis' central and sub-research questions and main argument is presented in sections 9.2.1 to 9.2.6 below.

### *9.2.1 How Has the Politics of Democratic Decentralisation in Post-War Sierra Leone Affected Public Service Delivery Outcomes?*

Sierra Leone's decentralisation and public service delivery scorecard is a tale of mixed outcomes. First, evidence from the case study suggests a strong numerical increase in service delivery infrastructures in terms of health facilities and schools built or renovated, and the extent of client use as measured by school enrolment, hospital attendance and the maternal and child health mortality figures. Such numerical increases have been at the core of the official decentralisation promise in the developing world (Conyers, 2007; Robinson 2007; Manor 2011). However, the evidence from the case study also suggests that this increase in quantity has not been accompanied by an equivalent increase in quality and equitable access. The figures tell different stories for different demographics across the four case study councils: for example, in localities such as Kenema there are no specialist doctors to provide crucial medical services such as gynaecology, whilst in Port Loko district, the teacher-pupil ratio exceeds the government's 1:30 threshold (MEST, 2012).

On a very positive note however, both health and education public service delivery had long histories of deconcentrated management structures well before the introduction of decentralisation in 2004 (MoHS, 2004). However, fiscal decentralisation led to easier access to resources for local service delivery by reducing the centralised bureaucratic red tape previously associated with it. Whilst this easier resource access had a positive effect on enhanced local service delivery, it also empowered a class of mostly unelected local bureaucrats, who were making crucial decisions about local services without meaningful engagement with local people. Access to resources for local service delivery may have improved as a result of devolution, but it has not translated into active civil society involvement in local decision-making processes. Therefore, it is difficult to suggest a meaningful correlation between the increases in service delivery infrastructures and the decentralisation project. To do so would require a different study approach and methodological models to account for the role of other actors, such as NGOs and central government, active in local public service delivery. For instance, in all the four

case study local councils, NGOs manage health centres, run schools and are at the forefront of local public service delivery. And, as the case of Masemara village in section 7.2 suggests, community action, rather than local government authorities, is crucial to the provision and management of local schools and education services. It would be simplistic therefore, to suggest that decentralisation alone is responsible for the numerical increase in health centres, schools and their clients.

Secondly, a contentious issue, not necessarily the focus of this study but very topical in all the visited data collection sites during fieldwork, is the idea of devolution of corruption (Kandeh, 2012, D'Arcy and Cornell, 2016). The ease of accessibility associated with local resources, especially with public procurement, and the potential for resource loot (Mahmood, 2010) means that local council authorities prefer to build schools and health centres, rather than improving management systems and making efficiency savings. But, perhaps most significantly, construction projects – in addition to providing easy loot – are popular with Sierra Leonean politicians because of their physical visibility, even when they turn out to be white elephants. The case of Port Loko District Council, which chose to construct a stadium and sports complex over a clear community preference for seed and fertiliser support for farmers, not only suggests allocative inefficiency but also the desire of politicians to embark on physical projects that they can point to as their legacies. Within the health sector, the introduction of the free health care policy in 2010, for instance, led to a significant increase in the number of nursing mothers and children under five visiting public health facilities. Within this service delivery complex, a number of unanswered questions persist, regarding the quality, accessibility, equity and local accountability mechanisms in public service and whether or not the same or better services could have been delivered in an efficient deconcentrated system.

Thirdly, the effective and efficient delivery of public services is invariably challenged by blurred lines between policy and practice: in the way MDAs plan their activities with local communities, how resources are accessed and managed, and how power, authority and individual and group interests interact in the distribution of national resources for local services. Across levels of policy formulation and service delivery, decision-making is skewed along lines of political exigencies, personal, ethnic and family interests, and sometimes takes place outside the legal provisions of the Local Government Act (LGA). In 2008, for instance, following the election of the APC a year earlier, the new

local government minister unilaterally decided to set the local tax at a flat rate of Le 5,000 per adult, to be collected by chiefdom authorities and shared on a 40-60% basis between local councils and chiefdom authorities respectively. The decision was not only taken without consulting local councils, it violated the provisions of the LGA (2004) which empowers local councils to set the local tax rate. Prior to the establishment of local councils, the collection and utilisation of local taxes had been the sole domain of chiefdom councils: the LGA however, transferred these functions to local councils, and the arbitrary decision of the local government minister to violate the provisions of the LGA further complicated the already inadequate sources of income generation and public service delivery at the local level and the feisty relationship between chiefdom authorities and local councils.

Fourthly, at the time of implementation, the decentralisation landscape was challenged by a decentralisation policy vacuum and capacity inadequacies which reflected both the inability and (un)willingness of the political and bureaucratic classes to develop a coherent decentralisation policy framework. By 2004, when decentralisation commenced, it did so lacking an overarching policy detailing the government's aspirations, priorities and trajectory. Although a policy was formulated six years later (in 2010), the vacuum led to varied interpretations of the LGA during the interregnum. The urge to seize the opportunity created by the post-war weakness of the state has been blamed for creating the impetus for the international community to push for decentralisation reform without an overarching government policy (Fanthorpe et al., 2011; Mbawa, 2012; Conteh, 2014). However, the state of chaos and uncertainty created by the policy vacuum also provided the opportunity for the government to blame the international community – and exonerate itself – should there be any negative outcome from the rollout of the LGA. It should not be forgotten that the fact that decentralisation is yet to be enshrined in the national constitution puts its continued existence in a tenuous and precarious situation.

On the basis of the evidence from Sierra Leone, it can safely be concluded that decentralisation has not delivered equitable, quality public services for all, nor has it delivered on its promise of allocative efficiency and participatory local development planning and local governance. Quantitative increases in service delivery infrastructures and client numbers do not necessarily translate to quality and equitable health service delivery. In village after village in this study, nursing mothers complained of financial

and material extortion by health service providers for health services supposed to be free, whilst delivering services based on local social hierarchy and stratification. However, the relationship between health service providers and local people is not only one of exploitation: it is much more nuanced and complex. In other instances, the study also shows that in extremely isolated communities, nurses and other health service providers can be the only lifeline between residents and the nearest big cities – bartering drugs for their patients and buying and bringing essential commodities from the city centres to the rural communities.

Outside of the four-yearly local council elections, which basically serve to endorse the candidates of the dominant political parties in the respective local council areas, there are few or no functional local accountability mechanisms. Those established under the LGA – such as the ward development committees – have been hijacked by party-based politics and rendered dysfunctional. Councils which had previously shown relatively good accounts of effective, transparent and accountable local governance are now seeing that progress reversed: for example, in Bo City following the end of the official tenure of the council's first elected mayor. His successor is disparagingly described as a 'one term mayor' by the city's residents, a testament to their disapproval of his political will and public service delivery record.

### *9.2.2 What Is the Nature and Progress of Sierra Leone's Decentralisation Project*

Sierra Leone's decentralisation legal framework, the Local Government Act (LGA, 2004) was construed on the basis of democratic decentralisation (Blair, 2000; Crawford and Hartmann, 2008), prioritising the transfer of public service delivery responsibilities to locally-elected authorities. The model, largely copied from Ghana and Uganda, incorporated local traditional power structures, blending components of political, fiscal and administrative decentralisation (Zhou, 2009; Srivastava and Larizza, 2011). The LGA also set forth the political and regulatory functions and responsibilities of local councils, including the qualifications for the election of councillors, mayors or chairpersons, the conduct of council business, composition of WDCs and councils' transparency and accountability mechanisms. Evidence from Sierra Leone's case study suggests that despite active civic engagement and clear public preference for a non-partisan local government elective system, the final text of the decentralisation legislative framework was a compromise, allowing for both independent and party-sponsored candidates. Unfortunately, the financial and administrative machinery and,

indeed, the ethnic nature of party politics in Sierra Leone (Kandeh, 1992) meant that over 96% of the councillors elected were those sponsored by political parties.<sup>395</sup>

The decentralisation system recognises two layers of local government – local councils and chiefdom administrations, with a 20% chieftaincy representation and with the local government ministry as the supervisory and coordinating agency of decentralisation (Gaima, 2009). However, the continued retention of chieftaincy as part of Sierra Leone’s decentralisation framework – a decision many have criticised for recreating the preconditions of war (Hanlon, 2005; Jackson, 2005, 2006) – has not only led to continued tensions between local councils and chiefs over the control of local taxes, land and natural resources, but also to social tension and elite capture in local service delivery (Kandeh, 2012). Despite the creation of institutional structures such as the WDCs and parliamentary oversight committees to promote transparency, and the fact that local councils are required to be open about and accountable for their financial and administrative processes, most of these agencies are either dysfunctional or complicit in the mismanagement of and lack of transparency within the decentralisation system. As one DMO – incarcerated by the police on the orders of the parliamentary public accounts committee – noted, his arrest was not for contempt of parliament as purported, but for his intransigence about paying a 10 million Leones bribe from the health sector budget in his region ‘for [the] council to give out to the visiting members of the parliamentary public accounts committee in the district’.<sup>396</sup>

Administratively, Sierra Leone’s decentralisation project combines the transfer of functions, personnel and assets, plus additional capabilities required by councils to deliver on their devolved functions. The LGA’s Statutory Instrument provides details of the specific activities for each devolved function and the timetable for devolution from central to local government. The administrative component of devolution brings together 14 local council core staff and other employees of devolved sectors such as nurses, teachers and agricultural extension officers with different accountabilities and reporting lines. Whilst the core staff are employees of local councils and managed by the Local Government Service Commission, devolved sector staff members are employees of the various central government MDAs and not under the direct

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<sup>395</sup> See NEC websites on the breakdown of elected mayors and councillors for the 2004, 2008 and 2012 local council elections <http://www.nec-sierraleone.org/>

<sup>396</sup> Interview with a District Medical Officer, Makeni City (August, 2014).

supervision of local councils – leading to a lack of synergised HR management at the local level.

Fiscally, the LGA provides the basis for intergovernmental fiscal transfers and the framework for councils' expenditure responsibilities, revenue assignments and the fiscal distribution formula. Local councils have three main sources of funding: own source revenue; central government transfers for devolved functions; and, lastly, external grants and loans (LGA, 2004). However, councils' locally-generated revenue and intergovernmental fiscal transfer data suggest that the financial capacity of councils is structured such that they are perpetually dependent on central government funding. In addition to the lack of local authority in determining the local tax rate, its collection and management, councils' service delivery responsibilities are disproportionate to their local revenue generation mandate (World Bank, 2014).

On the balance of empirical evidence presented in this study, Sierra Leone's decentralisation project made tremendous progress over its first ten years considering the centralised nature of the state before 2004 (Workman, 2012; Conteh, 2014; World Bank, 2014). Perhaps one of the areas where the most progress was made is on the general acceptability of its fiscal transfer formula. Despite the data challenges and discretionary nature of some of its distribution criteria (such as the discretionary local government development grant), the formula at least appears to be transparent and reasonably predictable. The decision in 2010 to review the first grant formula to accommodate new variables demonstrates adaptability to changing circumstances and has been hailed as a success (Edwards et al., 2014; World Bank, 2014).

Administratively, all 19 local councils have been fully established with a set of core staff in place. At the time of writing, 58 of the 80 functions slated for devolution have either been fully or partly devolved, even though in recent times a recentralising trend has been emerging. For instance, the education ministry has centralised the payment of school fees subsidies and the procurement of teaching aids, whilst the MoHS has recentralised drug procurement and the management of tertiary hospitals. Politically, the decentralisation project has turned over its third batch of elected councillors (2004, 2008, and 2012). With the World Bank's capacity building project for local councils fully rolled out, and training on the functions of the different layers of government provided, the number of local power struggles between councils, chiefs, MPs and public

bureaucrats has fallen, partly due to a better understanding of functions and role differentiation.

However, the maintenance of the post-colonial local government status quo – the local councils and chiefdom authorities – points to the SLPP-led Government's preference for chieftaincy as an integral component of local governance in Sierra Leone. With the origin of the SLPP itself deeply rooted in chieftaincy, and its reliance on chiefs for vote aggregation, it is not difficult to understand the party's affinity for the institution, even though such a decision contradicts the ethos of a modern decentralisation project (Tangri, 1980; Harris, 2012). In addition to the lack of integration of the two sets of local council staff into a single unit of local council employees, councils are suffering from serious staff attrition due to poor conditions of service and the lack of integration between local and central civil services.

Politically, local councils have had a rough ride since their establishment. There have been attempts by the SLPP to destabilise and manipulate electoral outcomes in councils considered APC strongholds (such as the decision to support the APC's estranged mayor of Makeni City Council) and the APC has not been blameless either, resorting to attempted bribery in an effort to secure support in opposition councils such as Bo, Pujehun and Kenema. The reality of party and ethnic politics in Sierra Leone is such that public bureaucrats and traditional rulers are actively promoting what Booth (2010) described as strangulation by politics, in which civil servants and traditional rulers actively promote the reintroduction or maintenance of colonial-era institutions with active central state control of the periphery, through a deconcentrated system in which chiefs and civil servants are the main agents (Fanthorpe et al., 2011). Examples include the reintroduction of the colonial role of district officer, made following a request by the Council of Paramount Chiefs to the President, and the head of the civil service's active manipulation of the political situation in Moyamba involving the Vice President. Therefore, despite progress in its political, fiscal and administrative spheres, decentralisation is strangled nationally by resource-losing bureaucrats, and locally by power-hungry traditional rulers; this brings into question the ability of the decentralisation promise of giving power back to the people to plan and implement development interventions in their localities.

### *9.2.3 What Explains the Performance Management and Service Delivery Variations Among the Case Study Councils?*

Beyond the attributive and simplistic correlational analyses usually associated with decentralisation research in sub-Saharan Africa, evidence from Sierra Leone points to several variations among councils' management performance and service delivery outcomes. These occur despite the uniformity of the decentralisation legislative framework and the implementation of a supposedly scientific and apolitical fiscal formula within the framework of a donor-led institutional technicism specifically designed to fend off political influence in intergovernmental fiscal relations. The variations were partly accounted for by a mix of local economic forces, political will, and management factors that manifested differently in the four case study councils. Whilst the formula-based fiscal distribution formula appears to be an arguably fair process of resource distribution, the formula only applies to the intergovernmental fiscal relations and not to the capacity and autonomy for local councils to generate and utilise resources locally.

The effective service delivery and high management performance ranking of, for example, Bo City Council in the comprehensive local government assessment framework did not happen in a vacuum; combinations of political stability, political will, effective management and administrative efficiency played a crucial role. Mayor Sannoh's political resolve to manage the council in the interest of its residents, together with the management style of the council's employees (especially the chief administrator) and the fact that Sannoh was elected for two consecutive terms, promoted stability, efficiency and trust in his administration both locally and internationally. The other three councils in this study, however, had inconsistent and unstable political leadership, without the required political will to drive change and attract external funding outside regular central government support. Where Bo had only one mayor for eight years (2004-2012), Makeni and Kenema each had three, whilst Port Loko had two council chairmen during the same period.

In addition to the political will demonstrated by Mayor Sannoh, the opposition councils of Bo and Kenema were crucial to the SLPP's political revival. Bo City Council and, to a certain extent, Kenema became crucial political launch pads to showcase and propel the SLPP's governance qualities for national electability. Three years after the beginning of decentralisation, the SLPP lost both the presidential and parliamentary elections of

2007. But in Bo City Council the idea of opposition politics was redefined by Mayor Sannoh. Whilst the euphoria of electoral victory stagnated innovative local development planning and programming in the ruling party councils of Makeni and Port Loko, both of which were cloaked in clientelistic expressions such as *'na we yone tem'* (it's our time) promoting corruption and neopatrimonialism (Lindberg, 2003), the opposition councils of Bo and Kenema developed a renewed commitment to national governance by projecting the SLPP's electability through effective service delivery and outstanding management performance output at the local level. It does beg the question, why does electoral democracy and its outcomes generate different motivations and service delivery triggers for different political interests? Mayor Sannoh's drive to promote a city-wide transportation system through the purchase of mini-buses, and the dedication of Sir Milton Margai's statue on the same day the APC-led government was celebrating the country's 50<sup>th</sup> Independence anniversary, brought the SLPP faithful together in the party's commitment to project its local service delivery and performance management ranking to make a compelling case for the party's electability in the next national elections.

However, the outcome of the 2007 general election had a different effect on the ruling party whose constituents generally looked upward to the national government for service delivery, than to their elected local government bodies. Power – for both those who have it and those searching for it – led to different expectations and different sets of commitment to service delivery, warranting this thesis to propose that the most appropriate local governance public service delivery scenario in Sierra Leone is one where the political leadership of a local council is led by an opposition party seeking national election, rather than the national governing political party – leading to a situation where one political party controls national government and an opposition party controls local government.

In addition to the ruling-party-syndrome that negatively impacts service delivery performance among councils of the ruling party, Sierra Leone's case study suggests that political opposition can positively promote service delivery and management performance motivations. Since 2007, SLPP-led councils such as Bo and Kenema have been the epicentres of political victimisation and co-option. But rather than seeing this as a negative political tool as presented by the party affiliation claim and party politics argument (Hibbs, 1992; Schmidt, 1996), they have skillfully embraced the ruling party's

political onslaught in two powerful ways. Firstly, in opposition councils that are less receptive to co-option – such as Kenema – the strategy has been victimisation. The grim reality of central government withholding funds and possible harsh punishment for mismanagement in opposition councils generated a spirit of commitment to effective and efficient service delivery. Some corruption-related offences that would be overlooked in a ruling party council can become the basis of prosecution and potential withdrawal of central government funding – as in the non-approval of the 2014/15 budget of Kenema City Council for over six months by parliament – kept opposition councils on their toes – and gave them an extra performance impetus.

Secondly, a few opposition councils, including Bo City Council, have embraced a cooperative, rather than a confrontational relationship with the ruling party. Such cooperation, and sometimes co-option, has led to additional central government funding as a pacifying – or to put it bluntly, bribery – mechanism in the so-called opposition strongholds. Rather than losing out, political co-option, bribery and prosecution threats have actually benefitted opposition councils by not only improving their management performance but also increasing their access to state resources. From the case study evidence therefore, it is clear that party politics have not been as negative as presented and political affiliation has not deprived opposition councils of vital central government resources. If anything, the idea of belonging to the opposition has enhanced service delivery output in opposition councils. The emphasis on technocratic institutionalism therefore, to check the excesses of political affiliation in the decentralisation process, failed to capture context-specific service delivery and management performance motivations.

#### *9.2.4 Does Decentralisation Support or Hinder Local Processes of Social Relations and Social Cohesion?*

Despite the official recognition of decentralisation by the government of Sierra Leone as a peace building and social cohesion tool (Government of Sierra Leone, 2005), and in line with the wider peace settlement instrumentalisation of decentralisation (Boone, 2003; Richard et al., 2004), evidence from Sierra Leone suggests that the Local Government Act has limited and less clear social cohesion provisions. The fact that institutions and instruments of local justice, conflict prevention and mitigation were not coherently integrated into a holistic decentralisation framework limits the extent to which decentralisation can positively promote post-war processes of social cohesion by

harnessing the positive rather than the negative attributes of social capital. Apart from the functions of the ward committees, there are no other tangible social cohesion provisions within the LGA designed to shift the negative effect of social capital away from inter-communal violence and towards altruism and cooperation. In fact, the communal processes of participation and transparency anticipated in the LGA were systematically transformed into instruments of ethno-political belonging, with councillors appointing party supporters as ward committee members without going through the competitive electoral processes prescribed by the LGA.

In addition, major fault lines of communal bonding and integration, social protection and justice were not integrated into the decentralisation framework. For instance, despite donor commitment to the modern system of local governance with little or no role for traditional authority, chiefs remain largely in charge of justice and law enforcement at the local level (Jackson, 2005; Fanthorpe et al., 2011; World Bank, 2014). Within a system of oppressive rural gerontocracy, punitive local judicial and penal systems and a discriminatory land tenure system that lacked an integrated post-war social resettlement, the preconditions of war (Hanlon, 2005) remain passively unresolved. And, even though the exclusion of young men and women from the political and social facets of their communities has been theorised as one of the causes of the civil war (Hanlon, 2005; Keen, 2005; Richards, 1996; Abdullah, 1997), tangible channels of youth participation in the new decentralisation dispensation remain vague beyond the four-yearly right to vote and be voted for. With no affirmative action for youth and women's representation and participation in local governance, decentralisation has not served the most vulnerable in rural Sierra Leone. Some major threats to post-war social cohesion in Sierra Leone include the so-called 'youth bulge theory' (Fox and Hoelscher, 2012:435), the incomplete project of DDR and peacebuilding, the rise of the Okada (motorbike taxi) riders and their lack of connection with local leaders – and active youth participation in local governance (Wai, 2015).

The evidence from Sierra Leone's case points towards an antithetical relationship between decentralisation and social cohesion – especially in the multi-ethnic settlements of Bo and Kenema. At the hamlet level, people are still dependent on the traditional ties of family and kinsmen – and not the local council authorities in their localities – for support and succor during difficult individual and communal challenges such as sickness and death. At the local level, people cooperate across traditional ethnic

divisions; they belong to the same labour gangs, secret societies, women and youth groups, and act for the common good. A unique sense of mutual support and protection permeates the everyday way of life. However, this sense of community is limited to small groups and villages, rather than active inter-village or inter-chiefdom connectivity; it generates a strong sense of bonding but a limited spirit of integration.

If integration is limited at the hamlet level and bonding is the norm, at the city and township levels the ethnic politicisation of decentralisation in line with the south-east/north-west bifurcation of Sierra Leonean politics (Kandeh, 1992) meant that decentralisation, rather than promoting social cohesion as its fundamental promise suggests (Boone, 2003; Richard et al., 2004; Scott, 2009), has become an active tool of social division between diverse ethnic communities. As Glickman (1995:3) argues, the challenge of ethnicity in Africa lays in its instrumentalist role, rather than primordial dislike for one another, making ethnic conflict likely to be ‘responsive to institutional configuration of a democratic nature’. Whilst recognising the presence of ethnic divisions among people, its instrumentalist function ‘need not be violent and destructive, but democratic institutions offer the possibility for ethnicity to be expressed and managed in a politically productive fashion’ and reinforced by an institutionalised and formulaic system of local governance (Glickman, 1995:3). Therefore, the supposedly apolitical institutional approach to decentralisation rests on a flawed premise and over-reliance on the strength of neutral institutions, disregarding context-specific socio-cultural processes and manipulated interactions.

Beyond the ethnic politicisation and fragmentation of local governance, the decentralisation project itself generated dissatisfaction and disenchantment because of its non-participatory nature, lack of inclusivity and its promotion of a new class of local notables – with access to power and wealth in a context of general poverty, thus fuelling local anger and resentment. The gulf between the World Bank, which preferred a complete dismantling of chieftaincy, and DfID’s softer cooperation and adaption approach to chieftaincy led to a weak, haphazard and unproductive hybridisation of traditional and modern local governance; modernity and traditionalism clashed in an unproductive system that generated schisms between those with power and resources and those without (Harvey, 2005; Fine and Saad-Philo, 2010). The actions of the holy trinity described in section 7.2, and the local tension it generated between the holy trinity clique (and their co-opted allies) and dissatisfied residents provided a potent

source of conflict. But beyond that, the politics of decentralisation, especially the question of how local representatives are when most councillors are political party-nominated candidates, generates conflict between groups. The division in Bo between the PAOPAs and the moderates, and the Kemoh Sesay/Alpha Kanu political camps in Port Loko reiterate the divisive nature of decentralisation politics. It then brings to question the relevance of decentralisation as a social cohesion tool and the manner in which it is presented within the post-conflict and peace building literature as the panacea for local stability problems (Brinkerhoff and Mayfield, 2005; Schou and Haugh, 2005; Green, 2008; Scott, 2009) when, in reality, it re-establishes and reinforces existing structural and institutional imbalances, rather than transforming them into local institutions of conflict prevention and mitigation in a holistic local governance framework.

#### *9.2.5 Sierra Leone's Decentralisation Project: Whose Model?*

The multiplicity of actors and interests in Sierra Leone's local governance reform explains how difficult it was (and is) for a dominant decentralisation model to be established. The final framework and its associated institutions were an amalgamated patchwork of interests, framed based on slightly edited templates copied from other decentralisation interventions previously supported by the World Bank, DfID and the UNDP (Gaima, 2009; Zhou, 2009). Whilst the overall decentralisation project itself was largely influenced by external actors, there was significant political class input and continuous adaptation of the original document to meet the then current political exigencies. The administrative structure of local councils, revolving around the chief administrator, was copied from Ghana's local council chief executive officer model, whilst the ward development committee was copied from Uganda's village-level approach to participatory development (Gaima, 2009). The creation of the Local Government Service Commission as a separate local government human resources management unit was prioritised by donors to guarantee the independence of local council HR management. Both the Decentralisation Secretariat and the Local Government Finance Department, for instance, were created by the World Bank-funded decentralisation roll-out project – the IRCBP - without any legal standing under the Local Government Act or the national decentralisation policy.

However, the political nature of decentralisation suggests that the model was largely a reflection of the political aspirations of national political leaders, as evidenced by both

the APC and SLPP's support for a partisan local government elective system. Perhaps one can safely suggest that a non-partisan local government system would have deprived the political elites of their prerogative of choosing candidates – from among the highest bidders – for elective local positions and, by extension, of their control of the political and economic spheres at the local level. In a political system in which securing the nomination of a political party in some regions of the country translates to electoral victory well before the ballots are cast, the contest for party nomination is fierce and deadly (Zack-Williams and Gbla, 2008). But in situations where the central government considered too much power had been given away to local councils, a successful programme of recentralisation has been implemented, beginning in 2008. For instance, the decision of the former local government minister to arbitrarily enforce a 40-60% split of the local tax revenue between local councils and chiefdom authorities served to further weaken the financial strength and independence of local councils. In addition, section 20(1) of the LGA (2004:16) which states that 'a local council shall be the highest political authority in a locality' not only makes uncomfortable reading for the central government, but also generates conflict between decentralisation actors in the exercise of political authority at the local level. With the passing of the Decentralisation Policy in 2010, section 20(1) of the LGA was altered to read that the local council would be the highest 'development authority' in their localities, negating the very political nature of local councils promoted earlier by the two main political parties (the APC and the SLPP) through the partisan elective local government system.

In addition to this on-going recentralisation drive, the central government reintroduced the controversial colonial role of district officer (suspended in 2004 following the rollout of local councils), disregarding donor advice and arguing instead that the temporary suspension of DOs had created a governance vacuum at the chiefdom level. The improving economic outlook of the country – especially with the booming iron ore mining sector – meant that the state was becoming less dependent on donor funding, and therefore was emboldened to take politically-sensitive decisions which ran contrary to donor advice. But as Conteh (2014) argued, the government of Sierra Leone need not have justified the reintroduction of district officers with the argument of a local governance vacuum: a more convincing argument could have been the strengthening of central government's monitoring and supervision of local fiscal management for devolved functions. However, such functions are already carried out by the Decentralisation Secretariat (DecSec) and the Local Government Finance Department

(LGFD), and any justification for the reintroduction of district officers along this line could have been contested as a duplication of roles. Unfortunately, role duplication is a major limitation of the decentralisation process, as in addition to DecSec, LGFD and the Local Government Service Commission, together with the finance and local government ministries, another layer of central government for the monitoring and assessment of council performance output sits at the Office of the President – the Performance Management and Service Delivery (PMSD) Directorate. Therefore, the reintroduction of the DOs was no more than a political project designed to ensure the centre does not lose control of the periphery to its political rivals.

As this thesis has consistently argued, the biggest challenge to Sierra Leone's decentralisation project meeting both its service delivery and social cohesion promises is the donor-led attempt to depoliticise what is essentially a political project. The failure of supposedly apolitical technocratic institutions to manage political processes of decentralisation has led to the (re)emergence of politics, this time from the backdoor; leading to a complete collapse of decentralisation's neoliberal institutionalism under the heavy weight of its contradictions.

#### *9.2.6 Access to Resources and Performance Management Output: Do Political Party Memberships Matter?*

The dominance of technocratic institutional compliance (Steger and Roy, 2010; Marriage, 2013) within the decentralisation and governance reform policies of western donors was designed as a check on the negative effect of party politics or political affiliations (Schmidt, 1996; Keefer, 2002; Crawford and Hartmann 2008), driven by claims of central government manipulation of resource distribution to local councils, 'along lines of political and economic alliance', and patron-client politics (Reno, 1995; Blair, 2000; Ahmed et al., 2005;17-18). But, as the analysis and evidence in Chapter Four suggests, political affiliation and its supposed unfair access to central government resources does not positively correlate with a council's service delivery and management performance outcomes. Whilst resources remain a crucial factor in public service delivery for local councils (Martinez-Vázquez and Smoke, 2010; Fjeldstad and Heggstad, 2012), Sierra Leone's case study suggests that those that receive the most resources from the central government are not the best performing councils. Although the ruling party council of Port Loko district is the top income earner from central government among the case study councils, the empirical evidence suggests that the opposition city

councils of Bo and Kenema perform better in public service delivery than their ruling party counterparts in Makeni and Port Loko.

Notwithstanding the limitations associated with the local government performance evaluation instrument, the evidence from the Sierra Leonean case study raises many critical questions around the presumptive nature of donor-led governance reform on the role of 'party politics' in intergovernmental fiscal relations, and its unwavering preference for institutionalism. It also assumes that institutions are apolitical agencies and that the interest of decentralisation actors is monolithic (Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Olukoshi, 2004; Dafflon and Madies, 2013). The creation of multiple institutions via a technicist approach to control the effects of political affiliation in Sierra Leone partly accounted for the clash of interests over power and resources between the different decentralisation institutions. For instance, the local government ministry had long argued for the transfer of the LGFD from the finance to the local government ministry, explaining why the 2010 National Decentralisation Policy (Government of Sierra Leone, 2010:5) states 'the Local Government Finance Department shall be a department within the ministry responsible for local government'. But observers of Sierra Leone's decentralisation politics have suggested that the section was 'inserted without the knowledge of the finance ministry, and tabled in cabinet when the Finance Minister was absent'.<sup>397</sup>

Sierra Leone's decentralisation experiment presented different motivations and incentive opportunities to its numerous actors. Whilst the SLPP, for instance, at the onset of decentralisation wanted to expand its sphere of influence and control over the periphery and provide jobs for its financially-strapped party members, the APC wanted some semblance of governance after its long absence from national governance following its overthrow in 1992. However, with the SLPP's defeat in the 2007 presidential elections, the party began to view decentralisation as a launch pad for future national governance. This suggests that the interests of decentralisation actors are neither monolithic, nor static. In fact, what is constant in all this complex political maneuvering is the changing nature of local and national political alignments. And, despite the much-talked-about south-east and north-west geopolitical dichotomy rooted in the SLPP and APC party politics, politicians can, and have, acted together when their interests coincide, even outside the strict boundaries of party politics as the relationship

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<sup>397</sup> Interview with a serving permanent secretary in the civil service, Freetown (August, 2014).

between Minister Dauda and Mayor Sannoh shows. If politics was the dominant resource allocation factor in Sierra Leone's fiscal decentralisation, it does not, for instance, explain why the opposition city councils of Bo and Kenema receive more resources from the central government than the ruling party council of Makeni. This is partly because the technicist approach to decentralisation fails to appreciate the multiple layers of cooperation and interaction between actors in local governance and the influence of socio-cultural and traditional factors outside what is strictly defined as political.

### **9.3 Conclusion**

This thesis has demonstrated that since the reintroduction of democratic decentralisation in post-war Sierra Leone in 2004, a stock-taking exercise aimed at assessing its impacts on public service delivery and social cohesion is important to review progress and challenges in Sierra Leone's local governance reform and service delivery landscape. The goal of the thesis is essentially diagnostic rather than prescriptive, as it unpacks the politics of democratic decentralisation in Sierra Leone, in the context of a donor-led governance reform project that prioritised institutional technicism over political economy. Therefore, it provides no ready-made solutions to what is a complex social phenomenon. Based on a rich political economy analysis that draws strength from Keen's (1994, 1996, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006) political economy of conflict and war, it provides a thick critical analysis, explaining the socio-economic and political forces that influenced and shaped the nature and progress of Sierra Leone's post-war decentralisation reform, and its local service delivery trajectory and variations between various local councils and also problematises the donor-led institutionalism preference in governance reform in sub-Saharan Africa. The study also provides critical insights into the implications of decentralisation on social cohesion by innovatively combining insights from decentralisation, ethnicity and violent conflict with discourses on social capital, social cohesion and democratisation. By doing so, the thesis not only contributes to closing the lacuna in empirical research on decentralisation and public service delivery, it initiates the process of developing a model for analysing decentralisation and social cohesion – two phenomena that have evolved separately over the years.

Among its key findings, the research noted the evolution of Sierra Leone's post-war governance reform trajectory as a process with multiple actors and interests which led

to a decentralisation model that essentially privileged the interests and preferences of international actors and local political elites over those of ordinary Sierra Leoneans. On the basis of democratic decentralisation that prioritises the transfer of political, fiscal and administrative responsibilities to local councils, Sierra Leone's decentralisation project has made tremendous progress, with a quantitative increase in service delivery infrastructures and the number of clients accessing them. However, the same cannot be said of the quality and equity of access, nor can a direct correlation be established between the increase in service delivery facilities and decentralisation. This is partly due to the multiplicity of service providers at the local level, not all of which are necessarily linked to the decentralisation project. Also, there is no evidence to suggest that the same, or even better, services could not be provided by an efficient centralised system considering the quantum of resources spent in decentralised local service delivery.

However, considering where Sierra Leone started, considerable progress has been made. The establishment of 19 local councils across the country with a team of core staff and operational offices, a system of fiscal transfers and a set of local council cohorts in their third successive term is, by any means, a semblance of reasonable success. It would therefore appear safe to agree with the positive judgment of Srivastava and Larizza (2011) that the 'genie is out of the bottle' and that it will be difficult to stop the wheels of decentralisation at this stage in Sierra Leone's local governance. However, recent centralising trends – including the reintroduction of the colonial role of district officer, and the clawback of functions once devolved to local councils – suggest that donor-led conclusions about the success of Sierra Leone decentralisation project (Zhou, 2009; Srivastava and Larizza, 2011, World Bank, 2014) may be hasty and naïve. While the genie might be out of the bottle, the thesis argues that it is still in quarantine, and can easily be forced back into its bottle by the lead scientists – the political elites.

Secondly, the thesis illustrates the lack of correlation between the much-vaunted promise of decentralisation and the development of cohesive social bonds in post-war societies. Apart from the Government of Sierra Leone's rhetoric on decentralisation and social cohesion through active civic participation, and the LGA's limited social cohesion provisions, major fault lines of social cohesion and integration – such as chieftaincy, land reform, social protection and justice – were not integrated into the decentralisation framework. Above hamlet level, decentralisation in Sierra Leone has an antithetical impact on social cohesion, as it promotes ethnic politicisation and the

emergence of a new and powerful social class with access to resources amid local poverty and deprivation.

Finally, the thesis demonstrates that access to resources alone – based on the political affiliation argument – does not determine a council's service delivery and management performance outcomes. Although the ruling party councils of Freetown and Port Loko are some of the highest earners of central fiscal transfers, it does not explain why opposition councils such as Bo and Kenema receive more central government grants than Makeni. The uncompromising reduction of chieftaincy, local kinship, land ownership, rural poverty and other socio-cultural dynamics to technical problems, and the promise of technical solutions to youth unemployment, rural gerontocracy, tradition and culture underpins the fundamental flaw of the donor-led decentralisation reform approach, its 'anti-politics machine' and the de-politicisation of an essentially political project (Ferguson, 1994:255-256). The setting of performance outcomes for political entities, such as local councils, with a set of instruments to evaluate success, reduces locally-elected officials and the decentralisation project itself to local barometers for the tracking of donor investment in the decentralisation project, rather than for councils' accountability to their electorates. Such a neoliberal, institutionalised and technical approach is both normatively intricate and empirically unrealistic.

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**Annex A: Sampling Table**

	<b>Geo-Political Regions</b>	<b>Local Council</b>	<b>Party Affiliation</b>	<b>Dominant Tribe</b>	<b>Council Type</b>
1	Eastern Region	Kailahun District Council	SLPP	Mende plus Kissi	District Council
2		Kenema City Council*	SLPP	Mende (few Mandingoes & Fullas)	Municipal/City Council
3		Kenema District Council	SLPP	Mende (plus few Kissi speaking people)	District Council
4		Koindu New Senbehun City Council	APC	Kono (some Mendes & Mandingos)	Municipal/City Council
5		Kono District Council	APC	Kono (some Mendes & Mandingos)	District Council
6	Northern Region	Bombali District Council	APC	Temne (plus few Loko & Limba)	District Council
7		Kambia District Council	APC	Temne, Limba & Soso	District Council
8		Koinadugu District Council	APC	Limba, Yalunka, Kuramkor (few Fullahs)	District Council
9		Makeni City Council*	APC	Temne (plus few Loko & Limba)	Municipal/City Council
10		Port Loko District Council**	APC	Temne (few Loko & Limba)	District Council
11		Tonkolili District Council	APC	Temne	District Council
12	Southern Region	Bo City Council*	SLPP	Mende (plus Temne, Fullah & Mandingo)	Municipal/City Council
13		Bo District Council	SLPP	Mende (plus Temne, Fullah & Mandingo)	District Council
14		Bonthe City Council	SLPP	Sherbro & Mende	Municipal/City Council
15		Bonthe District Council	SLPP	Sherbro & Mende	District Council
16		Moyanba District Council	SLPP	Mende	District Council
17		Pujehun District Council	SLPP	Mende	District Council
18	Western Area	Freetown City Council	APC	All tribes represented (lingua franca: Kriol)	Municipal/City Council
19		Western Area Rural District Council	APC	All tribes (Krio and Temne are the majority)	Rural District Council

\* Indicates a municipal council selected for the study

\*\* Indicates a district council selected for the study

### **Annex B: Semi-Anonymized List of Interviewees**

(Where identifiable names and titles are stated, this is done with the express permission of the interviewee.)

<b>Level 1: International/Donor Partners</b>				
1	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Institutional Affiliation</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>
2	Governance Policy Advisor	DFID – Freetown	Freetown	September 2014
3	Senior Economist	World Bank Country Office – Sierra Leone	Freetown	August 2014
4	Social Affairs Officer	EU - Sierra Leone Country Delegation Office	Freetown	August 2014
5	Head: Governance and Political Affairs	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – Sierra Leone	Freetown	August 2014
<b>Level Two: National Policy Makers/Influencers</b>				
6	Director - Decentralisation Secretariat	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development	Freetown	August 2014
7	Minister	Ministry of Education Science and Technology	Freetown	September 2014
8	Permanent Secretary	Sierra Leone Civil Service	Freetown	August 2014
9	Director - Local Government	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development	Freetown	August 2014
10	Director – Rural Development	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development	Freetown	August 2014
11	Senior Lecturer (Economics)	University of Sierra Leone	Freetown	August 2014
12	Former Minister	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development	Freetown	August 2014
13	Deputy Minister	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development	Freetown	August 2014
14	Director of Inspectorate	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology	Freetown	August 2014
15	Member	Local Government Service Commission	Freetown	September 2014
16	Senior Economist	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development	Freetown	September 2014
17	Monitoring and Evaluation Manager	Decentralisation Secretariat	Freetown	August 2014
18	Director	Centre for Local Governance and Rural Development	Freetown	September 2014
19	Southern Region Ombudsman.	Office of the Ombudsman	Bo City	May 2015
20	Director - Planning and Policy Development	Ministry of Education Science and Technology	Freetown	September 2014
21	Chief Medical Officer	Ministry of Health and Sanitation Chief Medical	Freetown	August 2014
22	Capacity Building Manager	Decentralisation Secretariat	Freetown	September 2014

23	Director - Primary Health Care	Ministry of Health and Sanitation	Freetown	August 2014
24	Coordinator - Sierra Leone Social Health Insurance	National Social Security and Insurance Trust	Freetown	July 2015
25	Member – National Advisory Committee	Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP)	Freetown	June 2015
26	Senior Lecturer	University of Makeni	Makeni City	July 2015
27	Chairman	APC Party – Port Loko District	Port Loko	August 2014
28	Senior Lecturer	Port Loko Teachers College	Port Loko	July 2015
29	Regional Chairman	APC Party – Northern Region	Makeni City	July 2015
30	Former Member of Parliament	SLPP – Bo District	Bo City	May 2015
31	Senior District Officer	Bombali District	Makeni City	July 2015
32	Paramount Chief	Nongowa Chiefdom	Kenema City	June 2015
33	Paramount Chief	Kakua Chiefdom	Bo City	June 2015
34	Secretary General	APC Party	Freetown	September 2014
35	Executive Secretary	Local Government Service Commission	Freetown	August 2014
36	Senior Staff	Human Resources Management Office	Freetown	August 2014
<b>Level Three: Public Service Delivery (Front Line Workers)</b>				
37	Human Resources Officer	Kenema City Council	Kenema City	June 2015
38	Chairman	Port Loko District Council	Port Loko Town	May 2015
39	Finance Officer	Makeni City Council	Makeni	May 2015
40	Development Planning Officer (DPO)	Koinadugu District Council	Makeni City	October 2015
41	Development Planning Officer	Bo City Council	Bo City	May 2015
42	Mayor	Makeni City Council	Makeni City	October 2015
43	Chief Administrator	Bo City Council	Bo City	August 2015
44	Mayor	Bo City Council	Bo City	June 2015
45	Employee	World Bank-funded Rapid Result Initiative Project	Makeni City	August 2014
46	District Medical Officer	MoHS - Kenema District	Kenema City	May 2014
47	Finance Officer	Port Loko District Council	Port Loko	June 2015

48	District Medical Officer	MoHS - Bo District	Bo City	May 2015
49	M& E Officer	Port Loko District Council	Port Loko	June 2015
50	Deputy Director of Education	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology	Port Loko	July 2015
51	Deputy Director of Education	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology	Bo City	June 2015
52	Former Chief Administrator	Makeni City Council	Makeni City	May 2015
53	Monitoring and Evaluation Officer	Bo City Council	Bo City	June 2015
54	Chief Administrator	Kenema City Council	Kenema City	June 2015
55	Former Chief Administrator	Port Loko District Council	Makeni City	July 2015
56	Former Chief Administrator	Kenema City Council	Makeni City	July 2015
57	Former Chief Administrator	Bo City Council	Makeni City	June 2015
58	Former Mayor	Makeni City Council	Makeni City	July 2015
59	Councillor	Kenema City Council	Kenema City	May 2015
60	Valuator	Bo City Council	Bo City	June 2015
61	Senior Police Officer	Sierra Leone Police Force	Freetown	June 2015
62	Community Health Officer	Ministry of Health and Sanitation	Port Loko	July 2015
<b>Level Four: Service Users/Citizens</b>				
63	Enumerator	Integrated National Public Service Survey	Freetown	September 2014
64	Member	Ward Development Committee	Port Loko	June 2015
65	Activist	Civil Society Movement	Bo	October 2014
66	Activist	Civil Society Movement	Freetown	September 2014
67	Teacher	Barlie Village	Bo City	May 2015
68	Head Teacher	Local Government Primary School	Bo City	May 2014
69	Activist	United for the Protection of Human Rights	Port Loko Town	July 2015
70	Activist	Budget Advocacy Network	Makeni City	September 2014
71	Student Nurse	Najal University	Bo City	June 2015
72	Community Activist	Dibia Chiefdom	Port Loko	July 2015
73	Former Chairman	Dollar Men Association	Makeni City	July 2015

74	Resident	Bo City	Bo City	June 2015
75	Local Journalist	Port Loko	Port Loko	June 2015
76	Human Rights Activist	Makini	Makeni City	July 2015
77	Local Temne Business Women	Bo	Bo City	May 2015
78	Former Member	Ward Development Committee	Lokomasama	June 2015
79	Female Community Leader	Lokomasama Chiefdom – Port Loko District	Lokomasa	June 2015
80	Local Agent	Italian Agribusiness Company	Freetown	May 2015
81	Resident	Gbanti Kamaranka Village	Bombali Distrcit	July 2015
82	Political Commentator	Bo Distrcit	Bo City	May 2015
83	President	United Indigenous Commercial and Petty Traders Association	Bo City	June 2015
84	Contestant	Local Council Elections	Bo City	June 2015
85	Member - Ward Development Committee	Bo City Council	Bo City	June 2015
86	Member – Ward Development Committee	Port Loko District Council	Masiaka Town	April 2015