

Crisis, Structural Adjustment and Creative Survival in Sierra Leone

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Résumé: *En Sierra Leone, la crise ainsi que les mesures prises pour la résoudre ont obligé la population à utiliser diverses stratégies de survie face au désespoir. De larges couches de la population sont privées de nourriture parfois pendant plusieurs jours. Un autre signe de la paupérisation de larges couches de la population est l'augmentation considérable des mendiants dont certains sont des employés de bureau tombés dans la pauvreté la plus abjecte. Le moyen de survie le plus important est "l'institutionnalisation de l'illégalité" consistant à fonctionner comme s'il n'y avait pas de gouvernement. Les formes que prennent ces stratégies de survie dépendent de la classe et du genre de l'individu. Par exemple elles comprennent l'utilisation des ressources de l'Etat et des compagnies à des fins privées et personnelles. Les femmes s'adonnent à d'autres activités pour compléter le revenu familial. La crise frappe les femmes si durement qu'elles s'adonnent également à un ensemble d'activités allant de la mendicité aux rapports sexuels pour avoir de l'argent, des biens ou des services.*

Introduction

With an estimated population of four million and an area covering approximately 72,000 squares kilometres, Sierra Leone is one of the smallest countries in Africa, one that is endowed with rich mineral deposits, as well as an abundant amount of off shore fishing and very fertile soil. At the time of the attainment of Independence in 1961, there was much expectation that this country, which had inherited an efficient civil service, would act as a model of democracy and economic progress in Africa.¹ Indeed, Sierra Leone became the first country in Africa to vote out an unpopular Government in 1967, when the regime of Albert Margai was narrowly defeated by Siaka Steven's All Peoples' Congress (APC), though the actual handing over of power was interrupted by a military intervention.² However, since the mid-1970s, the economy has been experiencing a number of difficulties culminating, in the 1980s, in economic and political crises.

Africa Development Vol. XVIII, No. 1, 1993, pp.53-65

- 1 Collier, G B, *Sierra Leone: An Experiment in Democracy in an African Nation*, New York University Press, 1970.
- 2 Cartwright, J F, *Politics in Sierra Leone: 1947-67*, Toronto University Press, 1970.

In this paper we shall look at the nature of the crisis facing the economy and society of Sierra Leone; the causal factors of this crisis; policies which have been taken to correct the crisis, leading to the long and painful route to the International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment conditionalities; and finally, we shall try to show how some groups and individuals have tried to weather the crisis.

Situating the Crisis: Nature and Casual Factors

In the late colonial and early Independent era (1950-1972), Sierra Leone experienced an average annual growth rate of 7%, which was one of the highest among the economies of the west African sub-region. This growth was accompanied by rising incomes in the agricultural, mining and manufacturing sectors.³ During this period, mining and agriculture remained the twin pillars of economic growth, particularly in the export sector. For example, between 1960-70, agriculture accounted for 33% of GDP, whilst mining accounted for 18%. In 1969, diamond export alone accounted for 69% of the total value of all exports. Other features of the period include: relatively low level of inflation (averaging below 5% annually in the period 1960-70); the relatively low balance of payment deficits; and low budget deficit of 3 million Leone for the decade or 1.3% of GDP. The period was also marked by large scale public infrastructural investments in road and factory building, designed to foster the government's policy of 'open door', in order to attract foreign capital.

However, by the mid-1970s, the growth achieved in the 1960s and early 1970s had started slowing down, due to external and internal factors. The country's economic performance after mid-1970 has been poor on most macro-economic indices. By the early 1970s, growth rate had slumped to around 3% a year; and by the second half of the decade, GDP had sunk to under 2% a year.⁴ After 1980 the economy experienced a steep decline as shown in Table 1.

The external factors, which cannot be analyzed in isolation from the domestic ones, include the shock to the economy from the OPEC oil price increase after 1973 and the subsequent inflationary pressure this generated internally, as well as the negative effects it unleashed on the balance of payments. For example, Table 2 shows the deficit in current account which appeared to be manageable up until the early 1970s, after which it rose dramatically.

3 See Zack-Williams, 'Sierra Leone: Crisis and Despair', in *The Review of African Political Economy*, No.49, December 1990; and 'Crisis, Structural Adjustment in Sierra Leone: Implications for Women', Institute for African Alternatives, March 1991.

4 Kamara, S et al., *The Effects of Structural Adjustment on Human Welfare in Africa South of the Sahara*, Sierra Leone UNICEF, Freetown, April 1990, pp.4 and 12.

Table 1: Average Rate of Growth per Capita 1970-85

1970-1975	1975-1980	1980-1985
-0.9	-0.7	-5.6

Source: *National Accounts Statistics: Analysis of Main Aggregate*, 1985, UN.

Table 2: Current Account Situation for Selected Years 1963-86

Year	Value in \$M
1963	-17.1
1968	-2.0
1970	-15.9
1974	-60.9
1978	-112.0
1979	-179.1
1980	-165.1*
1982	-160.2*
1984	-22.8
1986	126.0**
1987	-24.3

* The surplus in these years was the product of inflow of loan capital designed to build the infrastructure for the hosting of the Organization of African Unity conference in 1980.

** The surplus in this year was due to SDR provided by the IMF structural adjustment fund.

Source: Kamara, S et al., *The Effects of Structural Adjustment on Human Welfare in Africa South of the Sahara, Sierra Leone UNICEF, Freetown, April 1990.*

The strain on the balance of payment was worsened by the deteriorating terms of trade of the country's major exports. For example, in 1977 the price of a ton of cocoa on the international market was \$3,000, by 1986 it had slumped to \$600. However, not only was there a deterioration in the unit value of exports such as cocoa, there was also a decline throughout the 1980s in the total volume of some leading exports. Total volume of cocoa exported fell from 12,500 metric tons in 1983 to 8,600 metric tons in 1986. A similar fall was recorded for palm kernel, as well as diamonds, the leading export earner accounting for 35% of total export earnings in 1986. Recorded diamond exports dropped from 2 million carats in 1970 to 595,000 carats in 1986, and a derisory 48,000 carats in 1988. The fall in diamond export is indicative of depletion of the alluvial deposits, as well as the Government's inability to control smuggling of gem stones out of the country.

The deteriorating terms of trade, plus the depletion of rich iron ore deposits, led to the Sierra Leone Development Company (Delco), ceasing production of iron in Marampa in 1975. This was a major blow to the local economy where by this time Delco had become a *betriebsgemeinschaft*, as well as to the export earnings of the Sierra Leone exchequer.

The internal factors include the policy of under-valuing the prices peasant producers received for export crops they sold to the state-regulated monopoly, the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board (SLPMB). This policy meant that farmers who could 'smuggle' their goods across the Liberian or Guinean border, would not only receive better remuneration, but will be paid in 'hard' currency, the US dollar, which is legal tender in Liberia, or the Guinea Franc in Guinea. Other internal factors include: economic mismanagement and corruption, which tended to intensify leakages and smuggling. Indeed, these problems of economic mismanagement and corruption are epiphenomena to a more fundamental question; that of the political structure that would unleash the energy of the Sierra Leonean masses.⁵

One feature of the crisis, particularly after 1980, is the decline of economic performance: growth fell sharply as economic activities in mining, agriculture and manufacturing stagnated. Taking 1980 as the base year, real GDP fell to approximately 83% in 1984 and 1989 respectively.⁶ The fall in economic activities was not reflected in a fall in consumption, as such there was a rapid decline in savings and investments. For example, total real expenditure on health fell from 12.9 million Leone in 1980 to 4.3 million Leone in 1986, and to just 2.7 million in 1989. Similarly, real expenditure in education fell from 34 million Leone in 1974 to 10.2 million Leone in 1986 and slumped to just 6.0 million Leone in 1989.⁷ The increased consumption was financed by increased domestic borrowing, as well as from bilateral and multilateral sources, and by running down the foreign exchange reserves. Thus by the end of 1989, Sierra Leone's external debt was in excess of 1 billion USD or 128% of GDP,⁸ with little debt servicing during the 1980s.

One consequence of the down turn in economic activities was the fall in Government revenue, leading to the crisis in recurrent budget. For example in 1972, the Government received 20% of GNP in recurrent revenue. By 1978 this figure had fallen to 17.8%.⁹ According to Kamara et.al., 'only one

5 Zack Williams, (1990), also see the same author: 'The Politics of Crisis and Ethnicity in Sierra Leone', paper presented to the Center of African Studies, University of Liverpool, 22 February, 1991.

6 Kamara op. cit. p. 15.

7 Ibid. p. 64.

8 Ibid., p. 20.

9 Ibid., p. 25.

country for which the World Development Report (1989) carried data had a worse performance - Chad'. However, this fall in Government revenue was not reflected in government expenditure which continued to rise right through the late 1970s and 1980s as shown in Table 3. Table 3 shows that the problem of recurrent budget deficit became worse after 1975, and by the 1980s, it had assumed a crisis proportion. The budget deficit was used both to maintain the consumption pattern of the petty bourgeois class, as well as to augment the bureaucracy in order to facilitate the patron-client relationship, the hallmark of politics in Sierra Leone. For example, on the insistence of the IMF, the wage bill was reduced in the financial year 1988/89 by 634 million Leone, or 40% of the total wage bill of the civil service, with the disappearance 'ghost workers'. The net result of this budget crisis was to increase the money supply, thus unleashing hyper-inflation. By the late 1980s, inflation was running at 171%,¹⁰ the figure now stands at 124%.¹¹

Table 3: Government Expenditure for Selected Years
(in million USD)

Year	Revenue	Expenditure
1970	16.0	15.2
1975	14.8	16.9
1976	13.2	16.5
1978	21.4	32.1
1979	18.7	16.8
Average	16.5	19.9
1980	18.1	31.4
1985	7.8	19.5
1986	8.3	23.4
1988	9.8	17.3
1989	8.9	15.9
Average	11.8	24.0

Source: Kamara, S et al., *The Effects of Structural Adjustment on Human Welfare in Africa South of the Sahara, Sierra Leone UNICEF, Freetown, April 1990.*

Inflation has wrought havoc on vulnerable groups, such as the rural/urban poor, women, the old, children and those on fixed incomes.¹² Those on fixed incomes such as pensioners have seen their incomes reduce drastically

10 Ibid., p. 26.

11 Conteh, S. 'Joseph Momoh's Reign: Elusive Ideas', *West Africa*, 29th April-5th May 1991, p. 645. As we shall see presently, the inflationary pressure thus generated is partly the result of measures implemented to correct the imbalance in the economy.

12 See for example: 'The Children and Women of Sierra Leone: an Analysis of their situation 1989', Vol. 1, Ministry of National Development and Economic Planning and UNICEF, Freetown.

to the point where they cannot sustain the basic necessities of life. Savings have been wiped out, and successive devaluation has meant that average income has not kept pace with rising prices. As we have seen, development expenditure has suffered, with the result that the social and economic infrastructures are at breaking point. Public welfare services have taken the full brunt of the cut in expenditure; with private clinics charging prices well beyond the means of the average wage earner, have flourished. Drugs and other equipment, destined for the state sector, are often diverted to the private sector by corrupt officials. State hospitals are permanently short of essential drugs which are readily available in private clinics, and drug stores, a large number of which are owned by politicians or senior health workers. Health workers, teachers and other public sector workers, have worked for months without pay, thus producing widespread demoralization and subsequent fall in the quality of services offered. We shall return presently to look at some of the strategies which workers have adopted to cope with the crisis. However, we must now turn to look at how successive Governments in Sierra Leone have tried to cope with the crisis.

The Long and Painful Route to the IMF

The Government's initial policy response, as we have seen, was to continue building up huge debts through suppliers credit, and borrowings from the domestic banking system, with the hope that the crisis would either go away with an upturn in the world economy, which might increase demand for the country's exports, or that a new export commodity, such as the much talked about kimberlite dykes in the Kono District, might act as a *deus ex machina*.¹³

In 1979, the cost of staging the OAU conference to be held in 1980, forced the Government to its first major encounter with the IMF. Under this agreement, the former received a one-year balance of payment support to the tune of \$26 million, to tide it through what was seen as a short term balance of payment problem. This was the first major loan obtained from the Paris Club. In 1980, a three year extended agreement for purchases to the tune of \$200.4 million was concluded with the IMF. However, this agreement was suspended in the following year due to a default in payment to the Fund by the Government. In 1983, there was yet another agreement under the Fund's compensatory funding facility, by which the Sierra Leone Government obtained loan facilities for purchases to the tune of \$23.3 million. The follow-

13 Zack-Williams, 1990.

ing year saw the signing of a year's stand-by support programme of \$51.9 million. This too was suspended after only \$19 million had been utilized.¹⁴

It is clear from the above that there has never been any sustained policy of structural adjustment between the Fund and the Sierra Leonean Government. Virtually all agreements have had to be abrogated by the Fund due either to the inability of the Government to honour its debt to the Fund, or because of the Government's fear of the social and political consequences of implementing all the conditionalities prescribed by the Fund.

It is true that all these agreements were signed during the regime of Siaka Stevens. His decision to quit politics in 1985 and hand over power to his chosen successor, the Force Commander, Major General Momoh, was interpreted by many observers as an opportunity for a younger person with the vigour and discipline needed to correct the economic ailment of the country, and to implement the Fund's conditionalities to take over the affairs of government. Momoh, who in fact described his regime as 'the new order' Government, strived rather astutely to distance himself from the by-now discredited administration of Stevens. It was with this new found vitality that the new regime entered into negotiations with the IMF in 1986. In November of that year, the first long term structural adjustment facility with the Fund was concluded. This was preceded at the behest of the IMF by 'the most ambitious set of reforms... intended to reverse the economy's rapid deterioration since 1980'.¹⁵

This pact consisted of a year's stand by agreement and a three-year concessional funding to the tune of SDR 40.53 million under the structural adjustment facility, in return for certain conditionalities, which included the following:

- 1) The introduction of flexible, market-determined exchange rate. This 'floating exchange rate' resulted in massive devaluation of the currency within a very short period of time;
- 2) Liberalization of trade;
- 3) Reduction in the size of the bureaucracy, and Government expenditure;
- 4) The removal of subsidies on essential commodities such as petroleum and rice;
- 5) Decontrolling of retail trade, and the ending of State monopoly in the importation of rice;
- 6) Increase in the producer price for major cash crops;

14 Riley, 'Sierra Leone: Debt & Fiscal Crisis', in Parfitt, T. & Riley, S.: *The African Debt Crisis*, Routledge, 1989, for a history of these encounters.

15 Kamara, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

(7) The Government was also expected to honour its debt obligation to the Fund.

The aim of the agreement was to achieve equilibrium in the balance of payment, exchange rate stability, increase in export earnings as well as the expansion of the import-substitution sector. As far as the Fund was concerned, this was a 'complete package' and failure to implement any part of the deal would lead to suspension of the agreement. However, in April 1987, after only SDR11.58 million had been used from the drawings, the agreement was suspended by the Fund, because of what it perceived as poor performance criteria, particularly the failure to accelerate the depreciation of the currency, which was thought to be grossly over-valued and because of the Government's inability to honour its debt, leading to an accumulation of arrears.

The impact of these measures had more far-reaching effects than earlier attempts to rectify the economy. In particular, the floating of the currency and its subsequent depreciation, as well as the removal of subsidies fuelled inflation which, as we have seen, was running at over 170% in 1987. This further reduced the standard of living of most Sierra Leoneans, weakened the social and economic infrastructure, and intensified the scarcity of essential commodities. At the political level, there was widespread concern about policies 'designed to make things better, but in fact ended up impoverishing' the vast majority of the people. Workers, demanded increases in wages in order to make up for loss purchasing power, while several politicians made anti-IMF speeches. The 'new order' regime's credibility with the people was at stake, with many people quickly contrasting the ancient regime more favourably to that of Momoh. It was the fear of the social and political consequences of a rapidly run down economy without any safety net that forced the Government to slow down the pace of implementation of the conditionalities.

The potential for unrest was a stark reality for Momoh who emerged as leader of the party without having a strong base within it; and who had to depend on the 'young turks' of the *Akuway* group (an ethnic cabal) to bolster his support.¹⁶ Also shortly after he assumed power, Momoh had to deal with a case of attempted *coup d'état* resulting in the sentencing and execution of one of his deputies. Thus there were countervailing forces working against the full implementation of all the conditionalities of the Fund. By April 1988, the programme had been abandoned, and the country was declared ineligible to utilize the Fund's resources, due to the building up of huge arrears.

16 Zack-Williams, 'The Politics of Crisis and Ethnicity in Sierra Leone'.

Meanwhile, in order to tackle the ever worsening economic situation, the Government decided to gradually adopt a number of traditional adjustment measures demanded by the Fund, but, this time, at its own pace. The relation was to prepare the ground for another visit to the IMF in December 1989, an IMF staff team visited Freetown with the aim of helping the Sierra Leone authorities to implement a package of fiscal, monetary, and exchange rate measure and to assess their effectiveness. About a week after the IMF visit, the President broadcast to the nation stating the Government's intention to implement certain immediate measures. These included:

- 1) Curb on Government expenditure;
- 2) The introduction of a mini-austerity budget in January of the following year i.e. 1990;
- 3) The sale of special treasury bills to the non-banking sector at a significantly high interest rate i.e. over 45% in order to mop up excess liquidity;
- 4) Increase the special deposit the commercial banks hold with the Central Bank, the former should be free to determine their lending rate;
- 5) To implement exchange reforms involving the introduction of the complete liberalization of the exchange system and a market determined exchange rate;
- 6) To decontrol and raise the prices of petroleum products with immediate effect in order to reflect the increase in the excise duties and the prevailing exchange rate, as well as to privatize their procurement;
- 7) The repeal of the Economic sabotage Act which was designed to stop hoarding of the local currency and to undermine the 'parallel' market in foreign currency. This was seen as a hindrance to normal commercial activities;
- 8) There was also a commitment from the Sierra Leone Government to make significant repayments to the Fund for outstanding arrears;
- 9) The elimination of most price controls.

The objectives behind these policies were to reduce inflation, mobilize domestic savings in order to support growth and improve the efficacy of policy instruments. The strategy was to limit the growth of the money supply and restrict the expansion of credit, particularly through public borrowing from the Central Bank of Sierra Leone. By March 1990, most of these policies had been implemented in anticipation of the structural adjustment facility from the IMF. Thus, interest rates and prices had been decontrolled, and treasury bill had been sold at very high rates of interests. In April 1990, the currency was once more left to be determined by market forces 'floated', resulting in an effective 60% devaluation within a month;

and the minimum producer prices offered for the two major export crops - coffee and cocoa, were increased by 60% in June 1990.

Survival Strategies

The crisis and its antidote have forced Sierra Leoneans to adopt various survival strategies. They have also produced many ingenious and comical terms used to describe various states of despair. Thus those who have gone for a long time without food are referred to as suffering from *suckia*, i.e. someone living off air, the only commodity that is within grasp. One often hears individuals say in conversation, 'we de suckia bo'. There is a more advanced stage of deprivation than *suckia*, known (as airlock at this stage, the individual is forced on the street as a beggar). Again in conversation one hears individuals talk of trying to avoid airlock. As would be expected under such austere conditions, the number of beggars has increased tremendously in the 1980s. One informant told me that on Fridays (the Muslim Sabah when alms are doled out to the 'deserving poor') the rank of the baggers is swollen by a number of workers; including white-collar workers who have fallen into abject poverty. In this way one can see that both the crisis and its antidote have tended to pauperize the mass of Sierra Leoneans.

At one level, the major means of survival is to 'operationalize illegality' (i.e. to operate as if there is no Government). This assumes several forms depending on the class and gender status of the individual. The appropriation of state and corporate resources for private and individuals use is quite common and widespread. Within the petty bourgeois class this process is fuelled by the absence of democratic accountability, which prevents offenders from being prosecuted. At another level, many people have simply removed themselves from the formal sector, only to strive for survival within the informal sector. Thus, while the formal sector has shrunk significantly, the informal sector, which is not easily quantifiable, has continued to expand. Within this sector there are serious attempts at establishing a 'business culture', more specifically, a trading culture. In Sierra Leone every one trades - from little children, who sell kerosene and fruits for their parents or guardians, to women who sell cooked food to the urban poor: or politicians who use their influence to obtain import licences and set themselves or relations up in trading activities.

For many workers in the formal sector, especially the state sector, their job is only partially accountable for their social reproduction. Since wages and salaries have not kept pace with inflation, and in a large number of cases they have not been paid for months, many people resort to *mammy cokerism*, the local equivalent of moonlighting. This assumes several forms reflecting the class position of the individual. For example, skilled civil servants would spend much time either organizing their private enterprises or working in the private sector. Employment within the state sector soon as-

sumes the status of part-time work; teachers have set up 'private lessons' for students entering for either the 'selective entrance examination', the Sierra Leonean equivalent of the eleven-plus or those involved in public examination such as the 'O' and 'A' level exams. Given the low morale within state schools, it is clear that children who do well in these public examinations tend to be those who have had private tuition. Other forms of *mammy coker* include drivers using their employers' vehicles as taxis and lecturers undertaking consultancy for international agencies, in order to have access to foreign exchange.

Diane Elson has noted that underlying all structural adjustment policies is the assumption that women could continue to provide their services of social reproduction free of charge. As she puts it:

*Women's unpaid labour is not infinitely elastic - a breaking point may be reached, and women's capacity to produce and maintain human resources may collapse.*¹⁷

In a number of cases, women are now emerging as 'breadwinners', but without social recognition. Women as 'domestic managers' have to continue organizing the household under increasingly stringent and chaotic conditions. For most women the 'housekeeping money' has not kept pace with inflation. In order to supplement the household budget, many women now embark on various forms of income-generating activities. Even women who work full time are now engaged in artisanal, commercial or simple moonlighting activities 'to make ends meet'.¹⁸ Rural women try to stave off hunger through inter-cropping of both subsistence and cash crops.¹⁹ Many young women try to weather the crisis through *dregging*. This could take one or several forms, from doing *mammy coker* and other menial jobs, to begging or casual sex in return for money, goods or services. The proliferation of *dregging* is an indication of the severity of the crisis on women.

One important feature of the era of crisis and structural adjustment is the rise in ethnic consciousness and the spread of kinship networks. The latter has become an important mechanism for surviving the crisis. Various individuals adopt this strategy to weather the crisis. For example, in the late 1980s some traders in the Freetown metropolitan area used kinship network to thwart the decision of the leaders of the city council to ban street trading.

17 Diane Elson, 'The Impact of Structural Adjustment on Women: Concepts and Issues', in Onimode, B, *The IMF, The World Bank and the African Debt*, Vol. 2, IFAA & ZED Books, 1989.

18 Zack-Williams, 'Crisis and Structural Adjustment: Implications for Women'.

19 Richards, P, *Coping With Hunger: Hazard and Experiment in an African Rice Farming System*, Allen & Unwin, 1986.

These market women lobbied one of the vice-presidents who was a kinsman and through his influence the decision was reversed. Individuals used their contacts 'as brothers' within the bureaucracy to obtain favours. A brother is one who offers help in times of need. The period of economic decay has witnessed the spread of fraternities and sororities, such as Masonic lodges, Rotary clubs, tribal associations such as Akutay, for the Limbas, or Feron-sola for the Korankos. Others include the Association of University Graduates and fundamentalist religious sects. Indeed, an important line of research would be the relationship between the spread of fundamental religious ideas and the intensification of the crisis.

Another method of social network which is utilized is through the tradition of wardship. This involves poor parents fostering their children to rich relations because they cannot afford the financial cost of bringing them up.²⁰ These children tend to work for their guardians, looking after their children, preparing meals as well as household chores, in return for food and in some cases, education. The system itself is quite exploitative. Since the working hours are not regulated, many of these wards work for very long hours, while others are prevented from attending school because they have to look after the children of their guardians. However, as Blesdoe has argued, many parents in Sierra Leone do believe that hardship is good for training young minds. Nonetheless, that is an example of how kinship network is manipulated to facilitate survival.

Conclusion

In this paper we have looked at the nature of the crisis facing the people of Sierra Leone, noting that the causal factors are both internal as well as external. In the case of the latter we see that the Sierra Leone economy remained dependent on the exigencies of the world capitalist system. With regards to the internal factors, we have pointed to the twin problems of economic mismanagement and corruption, noting that the latter is the direct result of the absence of any political structure that is responsive to the needs of the Sierra Leonean people. The absence of democratic accountability, within the dysfunctioning one-party system, meant that actions and decisions were not tempered by social concerns, but by narrow class and individual interests. This meant that the energy of the people was not tapped. The people then turned to the information sector for their livelihood.

In terms of policy prescription, we have seen that successive Governments have found it difficult to embark upon a sustained policy of structural

20 For a detailed analysis of kinship as survival strategy, see Baptista Lundin, 'An analysis of the relationship between social organization and the strategies for survival in a crisis: a case study from Maputo City, Mozambique, mimeo, November 1989.

adjustment. In many cases the package is withdrawn by the IMF because of the inability of the Government to honour all the conditions, due to both the scarcity of foreign exchange and the latent fear of social unrest among the disenfranchised masses. Indeed, this remoteness from the people means that any policy imposed from the top was doom to failure.

In terms of the strategies to cope with the crisis, we have seen that individuals and groups have built up specific mechanisms as survival strategy. The dominant strategy of 'operationalizing illegality', is one which, together with the profligacy of the ruling elites, brings into question the legitimacy of the state. The contraction of the informal sector, the despair and sense of hopelessness which perforates life in the country, are all symptomatic of the growing problem of political legitimacy. It is not surprising that in Sierra Leone the anti-IMF agitation which is articulated by some social movements, is also strongly linked to the demand for a multi-party political set up. Clearly, the crisis and its antidote-structural adjustment, have had differential impacts on different sectors of the society. The devastating blow which has been struck on the social services, means the children, the urban/rural poor and women are taking the full impact of the crisis. We have seen how gender responsibility has been transformed without the accompanying social status, as well as the spread of *dreg*, resulting in the degradation of women.

The spread in ethnic groups such as *Akutay* and *Ferensola*, plus the rise of other corporatist institutions, poses a potential flash point which, if not handled well, could pose a threat to national integrity. At the time of writing (May 1991), the armed forces of Sierra Leone are locked in battle with groups of rebels who have infiltrated into the South-eastern part of the country through Liberia. The Government of Sierra Leone blames the Liberian rebel leader Charles Taylor, who in turn claims the fighters are dissident Sierra Leoneans. What is clear is that the rebels are utilizing ethnic contradictions to demand an end to the one-party system.

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