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The Vicious Circle of Data Gaps, Lack of Prioritization and Low Capacity: A Study on Post-Conflict Education in Sierra Leone

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The Vicious Circle of Data Gaps, Lack of Prioritization and Low Capacity: A Study on Post-
Conflict Education in Sierra Leone

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Spring 2014

SIT Switzerland: International Studies and Multilateral Diplomacy

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Abstract

This paper is meant to present the findings and analysis of a one-month independent study project on the topic of post-conflict education in Sierra Leone. By using databases and institutional reports, the study examines the issue of data availability of Sierra Leone's education sector and the data collection process. Through analysis of documents and interviews with experts, the study identified the importance of education reconstruction and the role of ministry of education. In the case of Sierra Leone, low capacity of ministry of education was shown as well the lack of prioritization from the government and international community. By analyzing the findings and putting together the pieces of the condition of Sierra Leone's education sector, the study recognizes a vicious circle that is stopping Sierra Leone's education from making great progress. Based on the conclusions the paper makes recommendations for the international community and the government of Sierra Leone, as well as potential areas of future research.

Preface

This study is an Independent Study Project for the School for International Training Study Abroad Switzerland International Studies and Multilateral Diplomacy program. All the students were given a month to conduct a qualitative research on any issue of interest. Originally I chose to study post-conflict education reconstruction in West Africa, which then got narrowed down to three countries. After an interview with a Counselor from the Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations Office in Geneva I decided to research specifically on Sierra Leone. Upon browsing through the World Bank database for information on Sierra Leone's education and finding most of the data missing, I finally decided to go in depth about data availability and other related factors.

I want to first acknowledge Dr. Oksana Myshlovska who is my advisor for this study and who has helped me so much with my research. This paper wouldn't be possible without her guidance and kind advices. I would also like to thank the staff of School for International Training Switzerland, Dr. Gyula Csurgai, Dr. Alexander Lambert and Aline Dunant for the opportunity of research and the support they have provided me through the process. I want to thank all the participants and staff I have contacted at UNESCO who have either provided me with useful information or referred me to other contacts. They have really shown me the great work that UNESCO does and have been nothing but supportive with my questions and requests for meetings. I would also like to thank the Counselor from the Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone who was kind enough to agree to meet me and talk to me about Sierra Leone from a native's perspective.

Abbreviations

APC: All People's Congress

EFA: Education for All

EMIS: Education Management Information System

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

GER: Gross Enrollment Ratio

MDG: Millennium Development Goals

MEST: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

NER: Net Enrollment Ratio

NPSE: National Primary School Examination

ODA: Official Development Assistance

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

RUF: Revolutionary United Front

UN: United Nations

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Emergency Fund

UIS: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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1.0 Introduction

The Sierra Leone civil war from 1991 to 2002 has left the country with much suffering in every aspect. As for now, Sierra Leone is still one of the least developed countries in the world and the education sector, even though progress has been made through the year, still needs a lot more work to meet international education development goals such as the Education for All (EFA¹) goals and the Millennium Development Goal 2². There is a big gap in data on Sierra Leone's education for the international community, showing flaws in the data collecting chain. The share of education expenditure of total government expenditure is decreasing every year. There is a lack of attention from the government and donors, as shown in public expenditure and international aid, to develop education in the post-conflict reconstruction process even though education is a key factor for a post-conflict country to develop and avoid future conflicts. Yet with less attention and resource the education sector would just have more poor performances and unavailable data that lead the donors to invest less, creating a situation that traps Sierra Leone's education in its current state.

The topic of this study is of great importance because data availability represents many things from the capacity of a country's Ministry of Education, to the priorities of the government, to the interests of donors and also the interagency coordination between different international development actors. Normally in a post-conflict country, education tends to be neglected due to the emergent needs in health, infrastructure and food security. For a country's security and sustainable development, youth development and a good education foundation are essential. Therefore, to lift Sierra Leone out of the low-development state and ensure international stability, a critical look at its education sector is needed.

¹ Education for All: a global movement led by UNESCO aiming to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015

² Millennium Development Goal 2: achieving universal primary education

The objectives of this study are to find the reasons and connotations behind the data gaps of Sierra Leone's education and explore other potential problems with education reconstruction in Sierra Leone. Through database research, review of documents and interviews with experts, the study is going to analyze the current condition of education in Sierra Leone and the different factors that influence its development.

This paper is first going to present the background of the issues, with a brief introduction of Sierra Leone's civil war and its effects on education, as well as a summary of the current status of the education sector. Then the paper will list all the research methods used during the study and recognize the limitations. Followed by a description of the analytical framework of the study there is a section on existing literature that addresses the issues with Sierra Leone's education as well the importance of education in a post-conflict situation. The literature review also touches on the significance of data in developing education. The main part of this paper is the analysis based on findings from different sources, which look at the capacity Sierra Leone's education sector critically and examines the influences of the government and international community. At the end the papers concludes all the analysis with several recommendations addressing the issue and also for further research on the topic.

2.0 Background

2.1 History of Sierra Leone's Civil War

Sierra Leone, sitting between Guinea and Liberia on the west coast of Africa, is one of the least developed countries in the area as well as in the world. A large part of its current status is due to a civil war that lasted from 1991 to 2002, which took away the lives of more than 50,000 people and caused the displacement of more than half of the country's population (UNICEF, 2011, p.7). The conflicts in Sierra Leone can be dated back to the 1960s right after the country

gained its independence from the British colonial ruling. The post-colonial history of Sierra Leone was unfortunately dominated by corruption, authoritarianism and other factors that contributed to the decline of the country (Pauson, 2005, p.30). A study by the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2004 has pointed out that it is possible that some Sierra Leoneans have come to the conclusion that the government structure can only be corrected and reformed through violence since “it appeared impossible to halt the decline of state institutions and processes through democratic means.” (SLTRC, 2004) In fact, when looking at the post-colonial development of Sierra Leone, there are a couple of factors that led to the unavoidable outcry of the people.

The first is the lack of accountability and effectiveness of the government. The people had their hopes high when the first president, Sir Milton Margai, promised democracy and a functional government. But the coup d'états in the 1960s eventually led to a one-party dictatorship by Siaka Stevens and the formation of the All People's Congress (APC)³. The regime has directly cause social inequality with disparity of power and wealth. Relating to the dysfunctional government, the development level of Sierra Leone was one of the lowest among the world even before the civil war. Because of the lack of basic social services such as quality education, health care and job market, illiteracy and unemployment rate was high in Sierra Leone, especially for the youth. Another factor is the exploitation of Sierra Leone's diamond and mineral resources. The welfare and development of the country were rather ignored by those who were more interested in the profits. Illegal transferring of gold and diamond expanded the black market and thus expanded the transfer of small arms of light weapons into the country, which provided rationale for violence (United Nations DESA, 2003, p.381). Therefore, the

³ Source: BBC Country Profile: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094419>

combination of failing government, unsatisfied and unemployed citizens, mostly youth, and the access to arms unavoidably pushed the country into a decade of war and suffering.

In 1991, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was formed near the Liberian border, declaring its mission to overthrow the APC and bring democracy to the country and thus starting the long process of suffering for the citizens. The RUF was popular in the beginning, drawing a large amount of youth who were also unsatisfied with “the privileged” in Freetown, capital of Sierra Leone. For many young people, the state of their country took away the possibility of education and a better future while the RUF provided them with the possession of arms and food, which they didn’t even get from their own government (United Nations DESA, 2003, p.382). But eventually the civil war was filled with abductions of child soldiers, use of drugs, sexual violence and amputation, leaving thousands traumatized and scarred both physically and mentally. The international community, mainly the United Nations (UN) and the West Africa community eventually intervened at the end of the 1990s. The war was declared officially over in 2002 with the disarmament process lasted to 2004.

The country has already been in the an underdeveloped state before the conflict due to weak governance and the civil war brought the average level of development even lower. After almost another decade, Sierra Leone has recovered from the conflict to some degree, but the general condition of the country’s development still needs more improvement. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of Sierra Leone in 2000 was \$605, which was lower than most of its West Africa neighboring fragile states. In 2012, the Sierra Leone GDP per capita has increased to \$1337, surpassing countries like Guinea and Togo along the way (World Bank, 2014). Currently, Sierra Leone ranks 162 out of 180 countries by GDP per capita according to the World Bank and ranks 177 out 187 countries by Human Development Index according to the

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2013). The indicators above showed that even though the situation in Sierra Leone has improved a lot since the conflict, it is still one of the most fragile and poor states in the world.

2.2 Status of Education

Sierra Leone has been the pioneer of education in West Africa back in the 19th century. Taking the influence of the British education system, Sierra Leone was the hub for teacher training and drew students from all the other countries in West Africa. However, the British style also led to focus of education to the elites and middle class in the city, causing the majority of the population uneducated or undereducated. This disparity of education resources, along with other inequity factors mentioned above, contributed to the tension between different social classes in the country. At the time of Sierra Leone's independence, only 15% of children age 5-11 and 5% of population age 12-16 were in school (Wang, 2007, p.34). Reforms for education have always been called for after independence, but the government didn't put anything into action until 1993, when the 6-3-3-4 education system⁴ was established and the National Commission for Basic Education was created. However, the civil war started and then all the efforts were shuttered by the violence and damages of infrastructure.

At the end the ten-year conflict, Sierra Leone found itself with not only millions of deaths and displacements but also a wrecked social, economical and physical infrastructure. Most schools were damaged, abandoned or wiped out of its ground; teachers were killed, displaced or escaped the country for good; the government still needed help with its own functions and satisfying basic needs such as food, water and medical assistance for its citizens. Most importantly, a generation of the youth was lost, as the victims or as the former-soldiers. A survey

⁴ 6 years of primary school, 3 years of junior secondary school, 3 years of senior secondary school, 4 years of tertiary education.

indicated that the adult literacy rate⁵ of Sierra Leone in the year 2000 was only 29.6%, and the primary school Net Enrollment Ratio (NER⁶) was 41.9% with both the North and East region lowered than average (GoSL, 2000). Given this situation, the recovery of education system in Sierra Leone was sure to be a long and hard trail.

Currently, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) is in charge of Sierra Leone's education development with the assistance of multiple international organizations such as United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Save the Children and the International Rescue Committee, just to name a few. In 2004, an Education Act was issued to require all children complete basic education: 6 years of primary school and 3 years of junior secondary school (Wang, 2007). It also abolished school fees for all children in primary school and in junior secondary schools for girls in the northern and eastern area; the entrance fee for taking the National Primary School Examination (NPSE) at the end of primary school was also abolished, leading to an increase from 26,000 students taking the NPSE in 2001 to 78,000 in 2005 (Wang, 2007). The number of students in primary education rose from 442,915 in 2000 to 1,252,343 in 2012; the youth literacy rate⁷ increased from 47.9% in 2004 to 61% in 2011, according to the official statistics by the World Bank (World Bank, 2014). In general, the education sector has improved from its post-conflict situation but there are still problems with the post-conflict reconstruction of the Sierra Leone's education.

Despite the progress made in the education sector, there are very limited data available for the public on both the national and international level. This lack of data, as would be presented in

⁵ Adult Literacy Rate: the percentage of persons aged 15 and over who can both read and write with understanding a short simple statement on everyday life.

⁶ Net Enrollment Ratio: total enrollment of the official age group for a given level of education expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population.

⁷ Youth Literacy Rate: the percentage of the population aged 15–24 years who can both read and write with understanding a short simple statement on everyday life.

the Analysis section, shows the lack of attention and priority of education by both the government and international donors. The results of this lack of attention are directly reflected in the capacity of the MEST. These issues, along with poor coordination between agencies and projects, pose a serious threat to the effectiveness of programming and investments, thus creating a vicious circle of less donor assistance, less available data and failed education improvement projects.

3.0 Research Methodologies

This study was conducted in a one-month period in Geneva, Switzerland and Paris, France. The researcher used a combination of multiple research methods to conduct a qualitative research on the data availability of post-conflict education reconstruction in Sierra Leone and its indications.

3.1 Methodologies

First the researcher consulted the databases of relevant international institutions and conducted data analysis regarding the statistics. The researcher used the World Bank database and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics. By analyzing the numbers and examining the data availability in both institutions, the researcher was able to find a pattern and build the research question around data and post-conflict education reconstruction in Sierra Leone. Besides looking for information through databases, the researcher also used documentary analysis to find supplementing information that wasn't available in the databases. Through reviewing institutional reports, such as the Sierra Leone's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) report, the researcher found additional data that either wasn't included in the databases mentioned above, or was different from the one presented in the database. Most importantly, the researcher conducted formal and informal interviews in

Geneva, Switzerland and Paris, France. There were a total of five formal interviews and one informal interview⁸. The formal interviews were all semi-structured, with a list of pre-set questions and the discussion of relating issues based on these questions. Out of the six participants, five were UNESCO staff that had knowledge about either Sierra Leone's education status or post-conflict education reconstruction. The last participant was a counselor from the Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations Office in Geneva and contributed a different perspective to the research. The researcher has also sent emails to the World Bank Data section and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics inquiring their methodologies of data collection and has received responses.

3.2 Limitations

There were many limitations to this study, with the biggest being time constraint. Due to the nature of this Independent Research Project for the SIT Study Abroad program in Geneva, the researcher was given a month to conduct the research and thus couldn't cover all the details and depth of the topic. Besides time, the researcher was also limited in mobility, especially since the focus of the study is on a country that is out of the reach of the researcher. Another limitation was the availability of data, which became the focus of this paper after the researcher found only very few data on Sierra Leone's education status to begin with. In this case the latest data available was from 2012, therefore the study doesn't speak for the newest progresses made in the last two years. All the limitations above have restrained the researcher from covering all aspects of the issue discussed, therefore future research would be needed to gain a full perspective on this topic.

3.3 Ethics

⁸ See Appendix I: Participants Information List

During the course of the study, the researcher followed the code of Research Ethics. The researcher has asked for consent from the participants before conducting an interview and before using any personal information of the participants. Before each interview, the researcher informed those with whom they work about the goal of this study and the possible positive and negative consequences of the study. The researcher used original writing and cited all works with permissions for citation while recognizing the names of the authors and ensuring that all works cited were peer-reviewed.

4.0 Literature Review

To gain a better understanding of the existing literatures and theories about education reconstruction and data availability, the researcher examined documents and studies on the topic. There are several studies done about the post-conflict education in Sierra Leone as well as the relationship between education and conflict in general but there were very limited studies about donor coordination and data availability.

In regards to Sierra Leone, there are many literatures on how the failure of education was part of the cause for the civil war in the first place. Even as early as 1995, Richards has noted that youth exclusion was a core cause of war (Richards, 1996) and ten years later Keen also stated that their “anger at the collapsing system” (Keen, 2005) played a big part in the conflict. Both authors have pointed out that the war provided the youth with an opportunity to participate in something instead of doing nothing and actually gave them hope for reversing the unequal power structure in the country. In the post-conflict era, many have been worried that the lack of attention and efforts in education reconstruction can repeat the same mistake in history. As a field research in Sierra Leone by Juila Paulson showed, staff from international organizations, school principals and scholars in Sierra Leone have all shown concern that the same education

problems that led to the war, “as if we had forgotten,” are emerging again. When the study was done in 2006, there was a “culture of violence” in the schools and the education system was not sufficient to provide quality education for the students (Paulson, 2005, p.75). Christi Freeman from the University of Notre Dame argued that the international community overlooked the problems with education and youth with “a short-sighted drive for immediate peace, disarmament...”(Freeman, 2008) Together these literatures have presented that failure in education was highly related to the breakout of the conflict and remains an important unsolved issue even after the Sierra Leone civil war was over. If the government doesn’t pay more attention and invest more into education, the youth in Sierra Leone might face similar situations as those that drove them into the rebel army in the 1990s.

Based on the multiple cases of conflict and education around the world, it is commonly recognized by scholars and experts that education is a key sector for post conflict reconstruction and future development of a country just out of emergency. The World Education Forum in 2000 has created the Dakar Framework, which stated that reconstruction process needs to pay special attention to the education system and that it plays a key role in preventing future conflicts (Paulson, 2005). In a piece of work on education in fragile states, Rose and Greenly made a point that failure to act and deliver improved education services can “make the fragility worse.” (Rose &Greenly, 2006) In general, education reconstruction is a crucial part of any states’ reconstruction process and to sustain future peace and development and “a higher priority” (Freeman, 2008) should be given to education.

When looking at critics and evaluations of international community’s role in a country’s education reconstruction, donor coordination and data availability are important to the effectiveness of projects and actions. The World Bank published a book in 2005, *Reshaping the*

Future: Education and Post-Conflict Reconstruction (Buckland, 2005). which was about the strategies, status and gaps for the international intervention in education reconstruction. The book talked about how education data for conflict affected countries could be unreliable and inaccurate; the interagency coordination could be poor and there might be mismatches between official data from different agencies on the same category. One important point made by the author, Peter Buckland, a World Bank Senior Education Specialist, in another article relating to the book, is that investing in education early in a post-conflict country is “essential prerequisite for sustainable peace.”(Buckland, 2006) Taking the same stand, Tomlinson and Benefield analyzed that there are usually little evidence and assessment following post-conflict education initiatives, which could cause the danger for repeated programs and difficulty in capturing accurate data (Tomlinson& Benefield, 2005). According to this study on the research possibilities of education and conflict, data accuracy, evaluation of programs and publication of information gather are all very important factors that could be easily overlooked in a post-conflict education reconstruction process because most agencies and governments focus on the short-term results.

A brief published in 2008 by the Chr. Michelsen Institute’s Anti-Corruption Resource Centre to promote Education Management Information System (EMIS) in Sierra Leone really emphasized on the importance of data collection and accuracy in the education sector for the post-conflict country. The brief looked back from 2002 to 2006 and concluded that “a lack of accurate, reliable and timely data has resulted in poor monitoring and corrupt practices, ” (Hamming, 2008) especially in cases where non-existing teachers were recorded or teachers don’t actually teach but still receives salaries from the government. It also stated that EMIS is important for the long-term development of Sierra Leone’ education because most projects in

education are depended on donor assistances. The donors want their investments being used sufficiently, thus requiring accurate data for goal setting and implementation of programs. Since “what does not get measured will not get fixed,”(Hamming, 2008) a well functioning data collecting and monitoring system is crucial if Sierra Leone wants to see progress in its education sector.

5.0 Analytical Framework

Based on the background research and literature review, this study will conduct analysis of the data and information gathered under the following frameworks:

- Education reconstruction is a crucial part of development for the post-conflict Sierra Leone and needs to be prioritized by the government and the international community.
- The coordination between international agencies and supports from the donors in the education sector affect the success of future development for Sierra Leone.
- Data availability is an important factor for both the government and the international community to take effective actions and solve the current problems with Sierra Leone’s education.

6.0 Analysis

6.1 Data Availability and Accuracy

The World Bank’s database, World Development Indicators, incorporates numerous information of development progress from almost every country in the world, but when focusing specifically on the education-related data of Sierra Leone, there are generally big gaps. It is very common for countries in conflict and post-conflict situations to not have complete data sets due to the circumstance. In this case, Sierra Leone, a country that has been out of the war since 2002, is missing many sets of data during the peace times. Based on the World Development Indicators

database and a spreadsheet of data on Sierra Leone from the World Bank Development Data Group, there are no data available on the NER for primary education in Sierra Leone from year 2000 to 2012, as indicated in Table 6.1 However, for other developing countries in West Africa the data was presented in most cases, even for countries like Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia, who went through civil wars in the beginning of this century. This example is only one of the many categories where Sierra Leone's numbers are incomplete. Other indicators such as persistence to the last grade of primary education and general pupil numbers in secondary educations are also incomplete, with a general trend of no data at all from 2002 to 2010, when Sierra Leone is supposed to be developing the most.

Table 6.1 School enrollment, primary (% net)

Year	Cote d'Ivoire	Guinea	Liberia	Sierra Leone	Mali	Niger	Nigeria
2000	58.25738	44.83125	..	..	..	27.89883	64.86935
2001	62.86219	48.36711	..	..	..	31.52249	..
2002	63.35843	55.83514	..	..	55.85586	35.09052	..
2003	60.05406	59.40902	..	..	55.9354	38.90975	..
2004	..	62.59013	..	..	55.96439	42.46452	66.12203
2005	..	64.54375	..	..	61.38336	42.75672	66.5636
2006	..	66.52865	35.09446	..	62.71232	43.46163	67.05246
2007	..	68.2504	..	..	64.88032	44.70873	64.19728
2008	..	67.55844	42.62398	..	..	48.80749	57.89189
2009	61.85739	68.67908	39.90547	..	68.72308	52.7175	58.76909
2010	..	70.39832	..	..	69.59055	55.85196	58.6094
2011	..	74.1458	40.62077	..	70.63298	60.79466	..
2012	..	74.38332	..	..	68.72776	62.80259	..

Source: World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2014)

When inquired about the source of this data, the World Bank Development Data Group stated that they use the data gathered by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), who said that they received the data from the MEST and Ministry of Finance and Economic Development in Sierra Leone. According to the Institute, the data appears missing for some indicators because

either the Institute didn't receive all the necessary data to calculate the indicator or there is an inconsistency in data, which would require further discussion with the country responsible.⁹

Given the above evidence, the MEST is clearly responsible for the missing education data in the World Bank database, as well the database of UIS. The reasons for MEST's inability to submit all the data are still unclear as there are no official records of MEST explaining their methodologies. Thus, the credibility and capacity of MEST to keep track of Sierra Leone's education development needs to be questioned. The comparison between the several West Africa post-conflict countries also shows that in Sierra Leone, data on education is the least complete, reflecting less prioritization than others.

Further research of the documents on Sierra Leone's education also puts the accuracy of the existing data in question, as there is a mismatch of information between two official sources. In the World Development Indicators database, it is stated that the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER¹⁰) in 2000 is about 68.7% and about 84.9% in 2001, as shown in Table 6.2 But in the 2005 MDG report by the Sierra Leone government, it clearly stated that "data available from the Ministry of Education indicates that after the civil war, primary school GER rose sharply from 65.3% in 2000 to 90.4% (79% for girls) in 2001."(GoSL, 2005) Even though the differences are no more than 4%, they cannot be neglected since both numbers are supposed to be coming from MEST. There is a possibility of human error or other factors but it is also the MEST's responsibility to make sure that the data across different institutional documents are consistent and reflects the status of Sierra Leone's education.

⁹ Email exchange with Xiaodan Weng from UIS

¹⁰ Gross Enrollment Ratio: total enrollment in primary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the eligible official primary school-age population in a given school year

Table 6.2 School Enrollment, Primary (% gross)

Country Name	Indicator Name	2000	2001
Sierra Leone	School enrollment, primary (% gross)	68.71768	84.86233

Source: World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2014)

As mentioned in the literature review, Sierra Leone has introduced the Education Management Information System (EMIS) since 2006 with the help of UNESCO. But the finding above indicates that the system is either not sufficient or not used correctly, leaving the situation of data collection unchanged in Sierra Leone. Again the reasons behind this situation is unknown due to limited access to information about MEST in Sierra Leone, but it is clear that more work and investigation is needed to see if EMIS is functioning in the MEST.

6.2 Public Investments on Education in Sierra Leone

Despite the progresses made in improving the education system since the end of the civil war, the education development level of Sierra Leone is still one of the lowest in the world, under the average of low-income countries. For example, the ratio of trained teachers in Sierra Leone's primary education is only 54.6% in 2012 (World Bank, 2014), ranking at the bottom of the indicator and is only slightly higher than several Sub-Saharan Africa states. But while Sierra Leone still has these unsolved issues, the public expenditure on education has actually decreased from 2000 to 2012, dropping from 20.7% to 14.1% (World Bank, 2014). This could be explained by the increase in total expenditure and a stable amount of investments in education. But given the importance and needs of education in post-conflict reconstruction stated above, the drop in number shows a lack of priority to education by the Sierra Leone' government.

The World Bank Public Expenditure Reviews of Sierra Leone in 2004 and 2010 are the only two publically available official reports that explain Sierra Leone's public investments in

the post-conflict period. In the 2004 World Bank Public Expenditure Review of Sierra Leone, it is clearly stated that further expansion of the education sector will be dependent on additional donor assistance on top of what was already invested “in light of the competing demands from other key sectors for resources.” (World Bank, 2004) There was no indication of what are these key sectors or proof that they are more important than education development in Sierra Leone. 6 years later, in the 2010 World Bank Public Expenditure Review of Sierra Leone, it is recognized that despite the large share of education expenditure (shifting between 12% and 20% during 2000-2012) in the last couple of years, the returns and effects of these investments are poor (World Bank, 2004). It also noted the decrease in public expenditure on education as shown in the database and that there is a broad shift in allocation of expenditure from security and social services sectors, such as health and education, to “more productive” (World Bank, 2004) sectors, namely roads. These two reports exemplified the initial lack of recognition of the essential role of education development and then the decreasing attention and investments over the years by the government despite the still problematic condition of education in Sierra Leone.

Florence Ssereo, a Programme Specialist from the section for Teacher Development and Education Policies at UNESCO has confirmed this trend when inquired about whether education is prioritized by the international community and government in a post-conflict situation. She said that education is always prioritized in policy but not necessarily in the budget of the government. In the case of Sierra Leone, it doesn't even reach 20% of government spending in the last few years. Ssereo also noted that when there are competing priorities, basic social services are normally the ones that suffer from a budget cut, corresponding to what the World Bank public expenditure reports showed above. When asked about the reasons behind this situation, Ssereo said it is possible for countries to think that the humanitarian interventions that

come after a conflict are addressing the basic social services so the government can allocate its budget to other areas. When that happens, the humanitarian agents are replacing the role of the government and paralyzing the government's abilities to budget for education. This situation could be what happened in Sierra Leone, as there was a large humanitarian prevalence by the international community after the war and the government's budget for education is lowering through the years.

6.3 Capacity of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technologies

Given the above findings on the dyfunctionalities of MEST, it is important to understand MEST's working process. However, according to the official Sierra Leone government website¹¹, the MEST does not have its own website for publishing information. On the contrary, there are three Ministries in Sierra Leone that have their own websites: Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and Ministry of Trade and Industry. The government's priorities are clear as indicated by its website. Ministry of Finance and Economic Development was also mentioned above when discussing data availability. As the shown in the database (World Bank, 2014), the only education-related data that was presented and consistent (except for year 2006) was Sierra Leone's public expenditure on education, which is more likely to be submitted by the Ministry of Finance to UIS. But wherever the data was from, it shows a sign of more attention on finance than education in general by the government. Thus, it is probable that MEST has less power and receives less attention when comparing to other economic related sectors, leaving the capacity of MEST to carry out education development plans in question. As mentioned above, the EMIS was introduced to Sierra Leone in 2006, but the fact that there are barely any changes in data availability even 6 years afterwards shows that the MEST lacks the necessary capacity. The

¹¹ Sierra Leone Government Official Website: <http://www.sierra-leone.org/government-websites.html>

neglected position of MEST in Sierra Leone also indicated the government's attitude towards education reconstruction, showing a lack of prioritization in recovering the nation's education system.

The reason why the capacity of MEST is important is that Ministry of Education is the key to education improvement in any country, especially for the least developed ones. According to Leonora MacEwen, an Assistant Programme Specialist at UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning, it is crucial for the government, namely the Ministry of Education, to take lead and "sit in the driver's seat." If a government is not paying special attention to its education development and leave it for the international community, not much can be done. This point was supported by Hanen Aidoudi from UNESCO's International Bureau of Education, who emphasized on the importance of Ministry of Education in a post-conflict scenario because there are always numerous organizations and projects coming in after a conflict and it is hard for the Ministry of Education in a country to manage and coordinate. Florence Ssereo, as an expert in teacher development and education policies, also noted that the Ministry of Education should take an active role in teacher training and distribution instead of international organizations because the government knows its own country's needs better.

However, despite all these needs presented for MEST in Sierra Leone and the perspectives of the staff at UNESCO, there are almost no projects currently for UNESCO to help with MEST's capacity. UNESCO, as the most important agency for education planning and capacity building, is not reflecting and improving the situation for Sierra Leone. There are many possible explanations for this and Joseph Ngu, Deputy Director of the UNESCO International Bureau of Education, stated that a country needs to ask UNESCO for help before UNESCO can step into any situation. So it is possible that Sierra Leone doesn't feel the need to improve its MEST's

capacity. There are also other factors, such as the role of the international community, which would be discussed in the following section.

6.4 Lack of Attention from the International Community

Since the lack of acting ability of the MEST was reflected in the previous analysis, the role of international actors and donors becomes important in the education development of Sierra Leone. However, the donors today are not showing signs of special attention to education. From 2001 to 2007, the Official Development Assistance (ODA¹²) by international donors were essential to Sierra Leone's recovery, with 79% of the total ODA going into peace building (OECD, 2010). This large share was logical given the post-conflict state of Sierra Leone. But as the country has been recovering for 10 years, the shift of the donor assistance was not directed to education. In fact, the share of ODA to the education sector for year 2011 to 2012 didn't even reach 10% of the total¹³. The ODA are from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and the main donors for Sierra Leone are United Kingdom and the European Union institutions so this low share of education assistance showed the lack of priority in education from most of the international donor community. According to a Counselor from the Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to United Nations Office in Geneva, the donors are the ones who decide the planning of Sierra Leone's development and a lot of what the government does is for satisfying donor's requirements on issues such as human rights. Based on his statement, it can be deducted that the inadequate fund for education development in Sierra Leone represents lack of interests from the donors.

From another perspective, UNESCO is one of the biggest international organizations that provide assistance for education in developing countries, yet its focus on Sierra Leone is not

¹² Official Development Assistance: a term coined by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to measure aid

¹³ See Appendix II: OECD Sierra Leone ODA Statistics

sufficient. While this study was conducted, none of the five interviewees from UNESCO had a lot of knowledge on Sierra Leone's education status. The participants represent the UNESCO headquarter in Paris and the International Institution for Education Planning, as well as the UNESCO Bureau for International Education in Geneva and was recognized by others contacted from UNESCO as the people who are mostly likely to have knowledge on Sierra Leone's education. Yet all of them expressed that they are not experts. The Director of Division for Teacher Development and Higher Education at UNESCO headquarter, David Atchoarena, did note that UNESCO is a very decentralized organization and the Dakar Office of UNESCO is the one in charge of Sierra Leone. But this also shows a lack of communication between different sectors and a general lack of attention to education in Sierra Leone, especially given the low education development level in Sierra Leone mentioned above. The fact that the sectors for education planning and policies not having projects for this country shows either the weak capacity of MEST in seeking assistance from the development organizations or the need for prioritization of education by the international community.

Director Atchoarena also added that the reason why education is not prioritized in many post-conflict countries is that it's not "life saving" and more attention are focused on things like food and shelter. This would be a reasonable explanation for the case of Sierra Leone ten years ago but not for the present with challenges in education. Another point Atchoarena brought up is that many humanitarian organizations would go into a post-conflict country with the humanitarian mindset that fails to link with the broader policy of the Ministry of Education for long term development. This tendency can explain the data gaps and failure to recognize the capacity development of MEST.

6.5 Vicious Circle

Based on the sections above, a clear pattern is showing for the post-conflict education reconstruction in Sierra Leone in the shape of a vicious circle. According to the World Bank Public Expenditure reports and common recognition, Sierra Leone needs to prove its capacity in planning and taking action in the education sector to receive more donor support. But the current power and capacity of the MEST is not sufficient enough to perform the task on the level of the standards set by the international community, as shown in the data gaps and low development indicators of education. Yet the MEST is not getting help from agencies like UNESCO and the government is not showing signs of more supports in MEST. Thus, it becomes rather impossible for MEST to make progress in improve itself or Sierra Leone's education. In this case, the donors who are already not paying much attention to the education development will not invest more since MEST can't prove its functionality, especially without the concrete data. This vicious circle could be part of the reason why Sierra Leone is trapped in its poor state of education and can't do much to save itself.

Post-conflict education reconstruction is a critical part for Sierra Leone to avoid potential conflicts and empower youth, which is a large part of the population and represents the future of the country. However, the government and the international community have not recognized this important link. With the existing organizations in Sierra Leone working on education reconstruction, the lack of accurate data can highly affect the effectiveness of their intervention and even waster a lot of money due to the incorrect information and analysis. Failed programming would only further convince donors that the investments in Sierra Leone's education have very low returns and not worth the efforts. It is possible that field agencies and civil societies who are working on projects for Sierra Leone's education have their own data

collection methods and information, but there is no sign of interagency collaboration and share of statistics.

7.0 Conclusion

After the deadly ten years of civil war, the devastating consequences have left a lesson for both Sierra Leone and the international community. It should be everyone's priority to avoid another possible conflict. Thus, as one of the main causes for the conflict, the education sector of Sierra Leone needs more attention to avoid another failure. However, in the current official international development databases there is a huge gap on Sierra Leone's education statistics. Data availability issues can lead to failure in programming that wastes money and time from the donors and the government. With less success in the education sector the donors would be less convinced that the investments in Sierra Leone's education are worthwhile. Further investigations indicate that despite the still severe education circumstance and the importance of education, there has been less share of public expenditure for education over the last decade. The trend of reducing budget on education shows not only the lack of attention to MEST but also the economic-focused development mindset of the international community and Sierra Leone's government. The non-prioritization also leads to a less functional MEST that can do very little for the country's education system. This series of problems brought up by data availability and accuracy puts the future of Sierra Leone's education sector in question and this non-prioritization of education needs to be addressed internationally by the donor countries. Since international donors are supporting the international aid and development organizations, such as UNESCO, it is their responsibility to put more attention on this issue. As the government's actions are highly influenced by donor opinions and the future of education depends on the lead of MEST, recognizing the importance of data availability and education reconstruction in Sierra Leone is

the most significant step for the international community. Only through more attention and investments in Sierra Leone's education will these data gaps be filled, MEST be empowered and the country's education status be improved; and by improving its education status, Sierra Leone would avoid possible future conflicts and succeed in sustainable development.

8.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis of this study, a few recommendations are made for the international community, the Sierra Leone government, and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

- MEST should set up a website for publishing information and publicizing education through the nation but also internationally. By showing that it is an organized, resourceful and powerful ministry, MEST can draw more attentions from the donors and receive more aid subsequently.
- UNESCO should follow up with the EMIS program in Sierra Leone by sending people, resources to MEST and stay for at least a year to monitor the process; follow-up meetings and discussions should be held every month by the UNESCO staff and MEST to examine the effectiveness of EMIS and solve the problems that are interfering data collection on different levels.
- With the EMIS in place, a coherent data collection and sharing platform should be built among all the education development agencies in Sierra Leone as well as the MEST, making sure that all the data are up to date and consistent across all organizations and reports. This platform can promote interagency collaborations as well as working relationships between the MEST and the international community.

- UNESCO should initiate special capacity building programs for MEST with the support of donors and the government of Sierra Leone. This program involves education planning, budgeting, data collection and presentation as well as human capital recruitment.
- The UIS and World Bank Development Group should take actions in discussing with Ministry of Education of the countries who couldn't provide full data and research on the causes as well as the possible solutions. Meeting should be held seasonally between the governments and the data groups to seek solutions for the problem of data gaps.

For future research, it is highly recommended the researcher visit Sierra Leone and conduct field research with the MEST, field organizations such as UNICEF, and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development to further explore the reasons behind the data gaps and decreasing expenditure. Due to the limitations of this study there is not detailed explanation or findings on the structure of MEST and how it collects data, which could be an important factor that influence the answer to the research question. Field visits to UNESCO office in Dakar would also be helpful.

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Appendix I: Participants Information List / CONFIDENTIAL

Appendix II: OECD Sierra Leone ODA Statistics

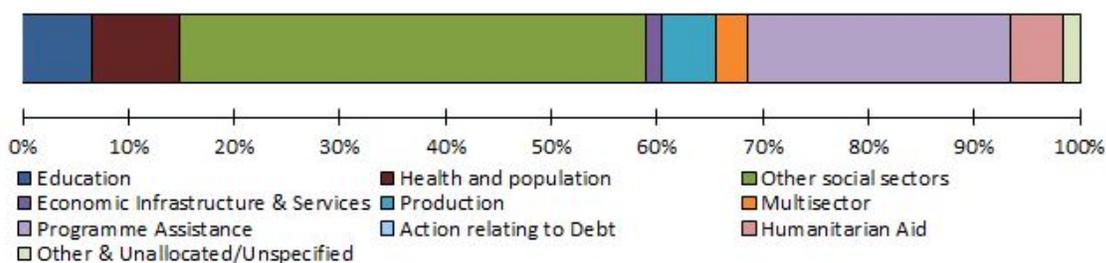
Sierra Leone

Receipts	2010	2011	2012
Net ODA (USD million)	467	425	443
Bilateral share (gross ODA)	42%	42%	42%
Net ODA / GNI	18.5%	14.6%	11.7%
Net Private flows (USD million)	- 13	7	29

For reference	2010	2011	2012
Population (million)	5.8	5.9	6.0
GNI per capita (Atlas USD)	450	480	580

Top Ten Donors of gross ODA (2011-12 average)	(USD m)
1 United Kingdom	87
2 EU Institutions	73
3 IDA	63
4 AfDF	32
5 Japan	24
6 United States	23
7 Global Fund	20
8 Germany	15
9 Ireland	14
10 Isl.Dev Bank	12

Bilateral ODA by Sector (2011-12)



Sources: OECD - DAC, World Bank; www.oecd.org/dac/stats