



## **Civil Society Index - Rapid Assessment**

**Sierra Leone**

**Report**

Campaign for Good Governance

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## List of abbreviations and acronyms

ALLART	Action for Large-scale Land Acquisition and Transparency
BAN	Budget Advocacy Network
CBO	Community-based organisation
CGG	Campaign for Good Governance
CORNET	Community Radio Network
CSAP	Civil Society Alternative Process
CSEEP	Civil Society Engagement in Electoral Processes
CSI-RA	Civil Society Index-Rapid Assessment
CSM	Civil Society Movement
CSO	Civil society organisations
DBOC	District Budget Oversight Committee
DfID	UK Department for International Development
ENCIS	Enhancing the Interface and Interaction between Civil Society and the State to Improve Poor People's Lives
FGD	Focus group discussion
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
KII	Key informant interview
MDAs	Ministries, departments and agencies
MLGRD	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
MOFED	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
NaARGEJ	Natural Resource Governance and Economic Justice Network
NEW	National Election Watch
NIT	National Implementing Team
NFHR	National Forum for Human Rights
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NMJD	Network Movement for Justice and Development
OSIWA	Open Society Institute for West Africa
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SiLNoRF	Sierra Leone Network on the Right to Food
SLANGO	Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organisations
SLAJ	Sierra Leone Association of Journalists
SLUDI	Sierra Leone Union on Disability
UNIPSIL	United Nations Integrated Peace-building Office in Sierra Leone
WiME	Women's Forum on Mining and Extractives

## **1. Executive summary**

### **The breadth and types of civil society in Sierra Leone**

Civil society has seen huge growth in its size and spheres of activities in Sierra Leone since the end of the war in 2002, more than at any other time in the country's history. Civil society in Sierra Leone today be categorised into four types, which have different aims. First, there are not-for-profit, membership-based professional bodies, which this study calls professional associations. These organisations largely seek the welfare of their profession. A second category of CSOs is that of not-for-profit service delivery and development organisations. These CSOs largely seek grant and contract funding to attend to service delivery gaps. A third category are CSOs that are primarily concerned with the pursuit of good governance and the maximisation of citizens' economic, social, political and civil rights. In this study these are called civic organisations. The fourth category of CSO is labelled in this study as social clubs or mutual benefit organisations. These are membership-based organisations that focus on providing welfare benefits for their members.

### **Internal governance of CSOs**

A general pattern prevails in which membership-based CSOs score more highly on indicators for internal governance, such as routine election of leaders, internal consultation processes and accountability, than non-membership organisations. Most civic and service delivery/development CSOs do not choose their leadership through competitive processes. Among civic CSOs, and particularly with service delivery/development CSOs, boards of directors have very little control over the actions of management. Across all types of CSOs, strategic directions are decided largely on an ad hoc basis because strategic planning and routine organisational assessment are almost entirely absent.

Changes in the environment for grants and contracts are having some positive influences in encouraging CSOs to improve internal governance. Firstly, CSOs are responding to earlier criticisms of their governance and accountability, not least to enhance funding relationships with donors and partners. Civic and service/development CSOs, in particular, having previously accounted for the highest levels of accountability weaknesses in civil society, have improved their tendency to follow clear procedures. Secondly, a practice is now emerging of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) entering into multi-year partnerships with local CSOs, particularly civic organisations, to implement projects in which the financial and administrative practices of local CSOs that receive funds are enhanced. These multi-year partnerships are also helping civic organisations to adhere to coherent mandates and demarcate their areas of specialisation.

Internal governance weaknesses persist in CSOs because some leaders of non-membership organisations, in particular, gain from these. CSOs' institutional weaknesses can also partly be blamed on the fact that the state's regulatory framework for civil society is not elaborate and comprehensive. The legal and policy regime makes little provision for encouraging CSOs' good internal governance and accountability. The legal and policy framework is largely restricted to granting permits to organisations to operate. The approaches of international development partners and government agencies to development work in Sierra Leone can also encourage CSOs' institutional weaknesses. In particular, international organisations still give funds to CSOs that openly have dubious legitimacy and elastic mandates.

## **Resourcing issues**

CSOs can be divided into two categories on the issue of their resource capacities. Some types of CSO have a measure of income security; these include membership-based professional associations and social clubs/mutual organisations that collect membership dues and undertake occasional fundraising activities. A second category of CSOs are however entirely dependent on grants from donors, and occasional service and contract fees. These are non-membership civic and service delivery/development CSOs.

However, in general, CSOs in every category in Sierra Leone have very weak resource bases, cannot function efficiently as a result, and are susceptible to collapse. Only professional associations and urban civic and service delivery/development CSOs are in a position to acquire basic office equipment and maintain some permanent paid staff members. Weak resource capacities are caused by CSOs' orientations, donor practices and the lack of a supportive regulatory environment. On the first of these, CSOs in Sierra Leone generally do not seek to supplement their income with revenues from services, products or rent from assets, and in the main they do not consider local sources of funding. Regarding donor practices, most grants that CSOs receive are for a period of one year. Donors are also unwilling to provide capacity building support in the form of hardware to CSOs. As a third contributing factor to CSOs' weak resource capacities, the legal and policy environment is narrow; it makes no provision for preferential taxation for CSOs or the promotion of philanthropy.

An over-reliance of civic and service delivery/development CSOs on grants and contracts from donors, and occasionally from government, is proving to be troubling. For instance, many service delivery/development CSOs that depended mainly on contracts and grants from the government, donors or INGOs have either closed or are dormant. Also, Sierra Leone's devolution process is largely completed, which means that most service delivery and development have been devolved from central government to local councils. Central government is therefore no longer contracting CSOs for service delivery and development work, putting many of them out of business.

## **Networking and collaboration among CSOs**

Networking and collaboration among CSOs are generally very poor. For instance, there is very little interface and interaction between civic and service delivery/development CSOs on the one hand and professional associations on the other. CSOs are not enthusiastic about attending each other's meetings unless there are opportunities for resource sharing. In the last five years no two CSOs have jointly implemented a project. Many civil society leaders are disillusioned with CSO networks and coalitions. Overall, networks and coalitions receive a very low score for internal governance, demonstrated particularly in limited leadership turnover and low levels of consultation of member organisations. CSOs expect networks and coalitions to offer benefits, such as opportunities for training, resource mobilisation, resource sharing and capacity building, but networks and coalitions largely fail to meet these expectations, in part because their resources are inadequate. All networks rely on grants from donors.

There is duplication in the mandates and memberships of many CSO networks. For example, the scope of the mandates, activities and memberships of key networks working on natural resource and economic governance issues are almost identical. Networks' approaches to advocacy work are also considered poor for a number of reasons. Firstly, the majority of networks have limited means of sharing information and engaging with communities and the public. As an example, all of the 15 networks examined in this research rely mainly on

newspapers and radio stations to carry stories about their work for publicity. Secondly, networks do not establish structures such as concerned citizens' groups, or representative bodies for engagement with communities. Networks rarely undertake participatory action-oriented research in support of advocacy. Finally, networks mostly see their international linkages as valuable sources of training, but rarely exploit the leverage of international linkages to achieve advocacy and lobbying success.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

Civil society faces huge expectations to contribute to good governance in Sierra Leone. Investments therefore have to be made in civil society to develop its stature and capacity to deliver on these expectations.

This study strongly recommends that active support be given to building CSOs' internal democracy capacities, including through the development of solid and easy to use administrative and governing instruments. This study recommends that grant-giving organisations begin to include an assessment of CSOs' internal governance performance and mandate credibility as part of the basis of their grant decisions. Given the critical role they play in sustaining CSOs, it is recommended that donors share greater responsibility in addressing CSOs' institutional weaknesses in a collaborative framework; for example, they could set mutually agreed benchmarks and rules for funding CSOs, a system for referencing CSOs' characters and a mechanism for checking duplication of CSO project objectives. It is also recommended that CSOs' multi-year relationships with INGO partners for project implementation should contain a component for strengthening management systems. Further, it is recommended that the legal and regulatory framework for civil society be expanded to offer the capacity to encourage CSOs' good internal governance and accountability. Amongst the many issues to consider would be the harmonisation of registration requirements, and the establishment of a single national agency, accessible to the public, for registering CSOs.

CSOs can never be effective if they rely on a narrow range of revenue sources. It is therefore recommended that CSOs be supported to develop their resource mobilisation capabilities. It is equally recommended that investment be made to build CSOs' long-term material capacities, including through training, the provision of hardware and the development of template systems for financial management and administration. This study also recommends that the government enhances the legal and policy environment to support CSOs' resourcing, addressing issues of tax preferences and concessions, and the promotion of philanthropy.

The study suggests there is a need to create a supra-platform for networking to bring civil society together to speak with one voice on critical national issues. Such a network should not take on a project implementation role, but only serve as a platform for networking, collaboration, mobilisation and collective engagement with power holders in response to national challenges. The limitations faced by CSO networks in advocacy and lobbying activities suggest the need to strengthen their capacity to engage with government and communities, demonstrate the value of collectivism and make use of international platforms and participatory research techniques. Finally, this study recommends that any support to civil society addresses the challenge of duplication in the mandates and memberships of CSO networks, including through auditing who is doing what, encouraging mergers and supporting sustainability.

## 2. Introduction

A number of studies supported by international development agencies have assessed the quality and vitality of civil society in Sierra Leone since the country's first democratic transition elections in 1996. Several studies aimed to inform the next steps in democracy building work. Among the major assessments was a *National Scoping of Civil Society Activities in Sierra Leone* carried out by DAI Europe Limited in 2006. This was undertaken for the Enhancing the Interaction and Interface of Civil Society and the State to Improve Poor People's Lives (ENCISS) programme supported by the UK Department for International Development (DfID). Assessment of civil society was also a critical component of the study of international democracy assistance to Sierra Leone, led by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations in 2005. The World Bank supported some studies on social accountability and the civil society landscape in Sierra Leone between 2005 and 2007, and a CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) was conducted in Sierra Leone in 2006.

While this Civil Society Index-Rapid Assessment (CSI-RA) stands on its own as an assessment of the situation of civil society in Sierra Leone today, it acknowledges these previous reports as valuable baselines against which progress can be measured. Civil society is rapidly changing, and this present study affords an opportunity to capture its current evolution and dynamics.

None of the earlier studies led to initiatives aimed directly at addressing the weaknesses of civil society in Sierra Leone. In the light of this, the CSI-RA was designed to come up with actionable recommendations to be taken forward by a broad range of stakeholders. It aims to offer an evidence base and point of departure for addressing fundamental weaknesses and helping civil society sector to play its proper role.

The CSI-RA focused on three key issues in interrogating the health of civil society: the governance and legitimacy of CSOs, CSOs' resource bases and sustainability, and networking and collaboration. The rationale behind the choice of these issues is elaborated further below

Section three of the report sets out the background, rationale and approach of the CSI-RA, and provides an overview of the implementation of the project in Sierra Leone. Section four discusses the concept of civil society and its historical evolution in Sierra Leone. This section also maps the diverse categories of organisations that compose civil society. Section five focuses on the findings from the three areas of assessment chosen by the participants. Finally, section six offers conclusions and recommendations regarding the future of civil society in Sierra Leone.

### **3. Civil Society Index-Rapid Assessment project and approach**

#### **3.1 Project background**

Since 1997 CIVICUS has operated the CSI, supporting comprehensive self-assessments of civil society in 75 countries. The CSI is a national-level self-assessment of the health of civil society. It essentially generates evidenced-backed data on the country context for civil society, focusing on issues of strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities. The results of a CSI are intended to contribute to strengthening the evidence base for civil society advocacy, providing a platform for civil society to identify shared needs, and assisting civil society in the planning and execution of action around common challenges and opportunities.

Building on the track record of the classic CSI, CIVICUS has since 2011 offered the CSI-RA as an additional tool that has a more flexible approach and a more adaptable methodology to cover a range of different situations and contexts. Sierra Leone was one of six West African countries that took part in the first wave of CSI-RA implementation in 2012/13.

#### **3.2 Project management**

The CSI-RA implementation had four levels of management and oversight. A National Implementation Team (NIT), composed of the project coordinator and the lead consultant, was responsible for the direct implementation of project activities. CGG was the National Coordination Organisation, in charge of the overall supervision and monitoring of the project.

A National Advisory Group (NAG), composed of CSO representatives, experts and media, was created to foster local ownership, and provide guidance and oversight. Its members were the Center for the Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA), Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CDHR), Civil Society Movement (CSM), Coalition of Civil Society and Human Rights Activists, National Election Watch (NEW), National Women's Forum, Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD), Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Sierra Leone Bar Association, Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce and the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU).

CIVICUS provided general quality assurance oversight and technical assistance, which included technical support to the NIT and NAG in identifying objectives, expected results and areas of focus, and adapting CSI-RA methods. CIVICUS' quality assurance oversight and technical assistance support also involved reviews and approvals of ideas and suggestions of the NIT and drafts of project documents.

#### **3.3 Methodology**

##### **Preparatory consultations**

The first activity that the NIT undertook was to constitute the NAG and hold an orientation meeting on 24 August 2012. The NIT then held regional-level consultations with CSOs leaders to consider which dimensions and indicators of the CSI-RA should be prioritised. In the Eastern, Northern and Southern Regions, four civil society leaders each took part in this process, while in the Western Region, where CSOs are most concentrated in the capital, Freetown, eight civil society leaders were consulted.

These views then fed into an adaptation workshop, held from 24 to 25 October 2012, in which CIVICUS supported the NIT to hold a process that identified the objectives, expected results and areas of focus of the project, and the adaptation of CSI-RA methods. The workshop identified three main areas of assessment based on their relevance to improving the enabling environment for civil society in Sierra Leone: the governance and legitimacy of CSOs, resourcing, and networking and collaboration. This was followed by the preparation of a specific research methodology by the lead consultant and CIVICUS.

The research employed a mixed methodology of desk research, a survey of organisations, key informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs).

### **Desk research**

Five tiers of literature were reviewed. The first tier was general comparative literature on the concept of civil society. This was done to provide comparative insights and perspectives to guide the definition of civil society and description of its categories in Sierra Leone. As a second tier, literature on the history of Sierra Leone was reviewed to narrate the evolution and growth of civil society. The third tier included studies mostly undertaken by international development organisations to inform governance and democracy strengthening. The review of these studies provided analytical insights on civil society, social accountability, citizenship, civic engagement, social movements and related issues in Sierra Leone. A fourth tier of literature focused on government documents such as laws, policy papers and national poverty reduction and development strategy papers. These were chosen to obtain information regarding government policies on CSOs, and illustrate CSOs' engagements and responses to national issues. The fifth tier of literature reviewed was organisations' documents, including strategic plans, project documents, monitoring and evaluation reports, annual programmes and project completion reports. These were chosen to find information on mandates, funding dynamics, collaborative approaches to project implementation, interactions among CSOs, accountability, internal governance and other issues pertinent to the study.

### **Survey of organisations**

There are no available figures for the total number of CSOs in Sierra Leone, partly because of the multiplicity of registration authorities, and resulting duplications in registrations. Government policy regulations require NGOs seeking registration with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MOFED) to register with the Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (SLANGO). SLANGO is an association voluntarily established by local and international CSOs with the aim of ensuring cooperation among its members, serving as a unified voice of the CSO community and providing liaison with the government and donor community. SLANGO has a membership of 317 organisations. However, there are scores of CSOs that have chosen not to belong to SLANGO. Further, CSOs that are not registered with MOFED are not registered with SLANGO. SLANGO's figures therefore cannot be taken as representative of the totality of CSOs in Sierra Leone.

This study used a sampling size that sought to include different kinds of CSOs across the country's four regions. A sample size of 135 was agreed, with 30 CSOs each sampled in the Eastern, Northern and Southern Regions and 45 sampled in the Western Region, reflecting the reality that most CSOs, and the vast majority of CSO platforms and professional associations, are located in the capital. A minimum of five grassroots organisations were included in each of the Eastern, Northern and Southern Regions.

A structured questionnaire was used to survey the 135 CSOs. This was mainly developed through a local adaptation of the general indicators list provided by CIVICUS. Fifteen civil society networks were surveyed using another structured questionnaire to provide deeper insight into CSOs' networking and collaboration.

### **Key informant interviews**

Interviews were conducted with the most senior officials of CSOs, such as executive directors and chairs of boards of directors, as well as programme officers. Key informant interviews (KIIs) were also carried out with officials in the relevant government agencies and departments dealing directly and indirectly with civil society, including MOFED, the Human Rights Commission and the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights. Both the perceptions of individuals interviewed and factual information from their organisations were sought in these interviews as a complementary tool to surveys and focus group discussions (FGDs).

### **Focus group discussions**

Four FGDs were held, one each in the main city of the four geographical regions. The FGDs followed the completion of the desk review, survey of organisations and key informant interviews. In addition to collecting new information, the FGDs were used as a convening tool, bringing together CSO leaders and representatives of relevant government agencies and departments to reflect on and validate the findings obtained from the other research methods. These group discussions supported the articulation of recommendations on strengthening civil society.

## **4. Civil society in Sierra Leone**

### **4.1 Concept of civil society**

Civil society can remain a nebulous concept, to use the terminology of Wilmot G James and Daria Caliguire (Diamond and Plattner 1999). However, there is some broad consensus around the critical features of civil society. Consensus approximates civil society as the sphere of citizens' voluntary associations outside of the family and the state for the pursuit of common ends. In the liberal conception, voluntary social associations beyond the family and state are expected to pursue civic and public regarding ends, with a good measure of demand-making engagement with the state, to be properly considered as civil society (Diamond 1999).

The challenge is that Africa is replete with citizens' voluntary associations with clear civic and public purposes, but that rarely make demands by engaging with the state. Voluntary community organisations, including ethnic and hometown development associations, as Ekeh (1975) describes, represent one such category of associations. Ethnic and hometown development associations are certainly self-generated and self-sustained, and a form of organised social life that is autonomous of the state and bound by shared values, to use Diamond's (1999) additional criteria for civil society, but they may have little connection with other civil society forms. It is important therefore to understand the diversity of civil society forms.

Since the end of the war in 2002, civil society is widely acknowledged to have played a more critical role in service delivery and development in Sierra Leone than in any other period of the country's history. For example, in the National Recovery Strategy, 2002-2003, (Government of Sierra Leone 2002) it was articulated that, "Government's essential counterpart must be civil society, which has a fundamental participatory role to play in support of reconciliation, security, promoting good governance and policy development." Consistent with this policy statement, the government, in the period immediately after the war in 2002, regularly contracted various kinds of CSOs to carry out service delivery and development interventions. Civil society became the donor's first choice to channel their support to service delivery for the local population. International development partners gave grants and contracts to CSOs for the delivery of services and development work.

In addition to serving as conduits for providing services and promoting development, donors have sought to position CSOs as pursuers and enforcers of government accountability. International development partners are seeking to support organisations engaged in public accountability activities, the promotion of citizens' participation in public life and the influence of state policies.

Access to funding opportunities is subject to CSOs officially registering as non-profit organisations. Civil society in Sierra Leone is however quite diverse, and FGD participants expressed the view that the majority of CSOs are not registered. This is why, for the CSI-RA assessment, the project team took into consideration a wide range of voluntarily constituted formal and informal associations.

### **4.2 History of civil society**

Sierra Leone has a long civil society history. While recognising the existence of traditional forms of associational civic activities that may have predated colonialism, this study restricts itself to associational life that is consistent with contemporary notions of civil society.

The evolution of the modern state of Sierra Leone began with a colonial project that saw the settlement of batches of freed slaves in what is now the capital city Freetown, between 1787 and 1800.<sup>1</sup> As the settlement of Freetown and its surroundings grew, associational life evolved among the settlers to respond to three categories of challenges: cultural cohesion, socio-economic welfare, and engagement with political authorities. Cultural cohesion pursuits saw the formation of collectives around masquerades, including secret societies. Meanwhile, to respond to socio-economic challenges, the settlers evolved self-help groups known as 'companies'. Citizens' associations such as these filled service delivery gaps that were not attended to by the colonial administration. In time these groups began to broaden their activities to accommodate political discussions, combining their roles as mutual benefit organisations with more obvious political orientations.

From 1851 to the time of Independence Sierra Leone had an array of citizens' self-generated, autonomous associations that began to resemble the civil society landscape today. These included trade and artisan related organisations such as the Sierra Leone Agricultural Society, Sierra Leone Farmers Association and the Sierra Leone Mercantile Association. Professional associations included the African Civil Servants Association and the Sierra Leone Bar Association. Organisations that emerged directly to make civic demands on authorities included the Negro Progressive Society and the Rate Payers Association. The mobilisation efforts of citizens to oppose the introduction of the Criminal Code led to the formation of the African People's Union.

Sierra Leone attained Independence in 1961 and enjoyed a brief period of competitive multi-party democracy. In 1968 Siaka Stevens became Prime Minister, and Sierra Leone's experiments with competitive multi-party politics halted in 1978 when the country became a 'one party state' under his All People's Congress Party. In Stevens' quest to consolidate hegemony over the state, those sections of Sierra Leonean society that held residual power to check his ambitions were targets for decapitation. Civil society was a purposive target for what Sesay (1999: 296-297) calls 'suffocation'. According to Sesay, Stevens' regime used a combination of methods including co-option, patronage, harassment and repression. Stevens retired in 1985 and gave power to his handpicked ex-head of military Joseph Saidu Momoh. The attitude of the regime towards dissent and citizens' accountability demands remained unchanged. Many studies have concluded that these circumstances of bad governance contributed to the outbreak of civil war in 1991.

In many ways the war precipitated the re-emergence of civil society. Many human rights organisations started up to respond to the effects of the 1991-2002 civil war while others took up activism to influence peace settlements between different factions in the conflict. Collective action pursued through civil society included mass demonstrations in support of peace, the issuing of position statements on peace settlement, human rights monitoring and reporting, and participation in critical national meetings.

### **4.3. Mapping civil society**

Diamond (1999: 222) argues that, "...one of the most misleading and trivializing conceptualizations of civil society is to treat it as 'organizations outside of the state'." This CSI-RA takes particular note of these 'trivializing conceptualizations', not least because there seems to be an emerging trend of associations that have their identities connected with state

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<sup>1</sup> This section draws heavily from Wyse (1989).

institutions in Sierra Leone. Examples include the Sierra Leone Association of Local Councils and the Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians. The Sierra Leone CSI-RA takes its cue from this and for the purposes of this study recognises an organisation as belonging to civil society when it fulfils the following criteria (in addition to the earlier definition given):

- voluntarily established by people without the state;
- relates to the state but does not seek control over or within the state;
- does not have its identity lodged in a state institution.

These criteria are supported by a reading of a number of earlier studies on civil society in Sierra Leone, and corroborated by KIIs and FGDs.

Organisations that fulfil these criteria can be categorised into four types of CSOs, based on who their members are and what broad types of public ends they pursue. Each category would of course contain CSOs that could be further distinguishable from each other on a number of grounds. For instance, social clubs/mutual benefit organisations would include alumni associations, descendants' unions, leisure clubs and self-help groups. However, this study considers that there is utility in distinguishing between some broad categories of CSO types.

#### **a. Elite professional associations**

Elite professional associations are not-for-profit, membership-based, professional, artisan and trade interest organisations. The Sierra Leone Bar Association, Sierra Leone Teachers Union, Motor Drivers and General Transport Workers Union, Sierra Leone Medical and Dental Association and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists are examples of elite professional associations. They derive their income chiefly from membership fees. These organisations seek the welfare of their profession mainly through bargaining with government for national level outcomes, a characteristic that makes them different from social clubs/mutual benefit organisations.

#### **b. Service delivery and development not-for-profit organisations**

In Sierra Leone there are many citizens' organisations with mandates to provide basic social and development services on a non-profit basis. Often, these organisations respond to gaps in service delivery in communities that the government has not filled. Service delivery and development organisations are mostly non-membership based and so don't have membership fees as their primary source of income, depending mostly on contracts offered by national government or international development agencies for service delivery and development work. Service delivery/development organisations were key recipients of contracts and grants from national government and international development agencies to implement projects on demobilisation and re-integration of ex-combatants, rehabilitation of community infrastructure and resettlement of internally displaced persons in the period immediately after the war in 2002. Service delivery/development organisations can be community based or have a national reach in their operations. Areas of focus for service delivery/development organisations have predominantly been health, agriculture, education and community infrastructure, such as feeder roads, community centres and wells.

In addition to service delivery and development, these organisations serve as channels to make service delivery and development policy demands on the state and relevant external actors.

### **c. Good governance and rights-promoting organisations**

Some CSOs in Sierra Leone are primarily concerned with the pursuit of good governance and the maximisation of citizens' economic, social, political and civil rights. There are two strands in the work of such organisations. Firstly, they engage with the state to negotiate policy and related concessions in pursuit of good governance and the enjoyment of rights. In their work they monitor and report excesses of state actors, and advocate and lobby. Secondly, CSOs working on good governance and rights issues seek to educate, orient and mobilise citizens in the protection of rights and the vitality and quality of democracy and good governance. These organisations are labelled here as civic organisations (Diamond and Platner 1999: 39).

These organisations, which have a more direct involvement in democratic activism, have historical antecedents in Sierra Leone, but it was not until the transition elections in 1996 that they expanded in number (Sesay and Hughes 2005), covering a broad range of work on human rights, accountability in public office, justice, peace, elections and related issues.

### **d. Social clubs/mutual benefit organisations**

The category of CSOs that this assessment describes as social clubs, also referred to as mutual benefit organisations or, by the Ministry of Social Welfare, as friendly societies, include membership based leisure groups, alumni associations, credit unions, cooperatives, hometown and descendant associations and hawkers' and traders' associations. The distinguishing features of social clubs/mutual benefit organisations in Sierra Leone are that they are always membership based, do not operate at national levels, and focus mostly on securing benefits for their members. Associations formed this way also used to be known as 'self-help' groups. Social clubs/mutual benefit organisations are among the earliest forms of CSOs in Sierra Leone.

## **4.4 Power, influence and sizes of the four categories of CSOs**

Elite professional associations are assessed by this study as the most powerful and influential of the four CSO categories in Sierra Leone. This is because they hold a number of resources not sufficiently available to other types of CSOs, including financial resources, education levels of members, large membership and strategic relevance to the state.

With subscription-paying members, professional associations can boast of independent resources to enable autonomous action, which is not the case with civic and service delivery/development CSOs, which would struggle to act without external grant support. Membership is also an asset: professional associations have a large membership, meaning that they spread across the country and can use strategies such as strikes and public demonstrations in negotiating their interests with government. The fact that most professional associations have an educated membership also enables them to be in a stronger position to negotiate group interests. Lastly, these associations are formed around sectors that are strategic in the running of society, including education, justice, media, medicine and transportation. National government has therefore been quicker to listen to and engage with professional associations, while for the same reason, the public has been quicker to take note of the interest negotiation actions of such CSOs.

There are less than a dozen elite professional associations in Sierra Leone, with the prominent ones being the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, Sierra Leone Bar Association, Sierra Leone Indigenous Commercial and Petty Traders Union, Sierra Leone Medical and Dental Association and the Sierra Leone Motor Drivers and General Transport Workers Union.

Compared to this, few categories of civic and service delivery/development CSOs can be considered powerful, and those that possess some power are those with capacity to mobilise public opinion and generate public interest through reports, press releases and events to which government and the public respond. These CSOs have brand recognition, long involvement in civic activism and development work, and local and international networks to shore up their power.

In comparison, although most Sierra Leoneans are thought to belong to a social club/mutual benefit organisation of some kind, individual organisations have small membership bases, low resources and are mostly interested in their own affairs, meaning that they are not in a position of power. It is in this last category that one mostly finds the CSOs that are not officially registered with the corresponding government authority.

## **5. Analysis of civil society in Sierra Leone**

### **5.1 Governance and legitimacy of CSOs**

#### ***Background***

As mentioned above, a number of studies have been made into civil society in Sierra Leone since the country's first democratic transition elections in 1996. A central concern in these studies was the extent to which CSOs function as legitimate institutions. Essentially, the studies looked at the extent to which CSOs have autonomy, coherent mandates and functional boundaries, and rely on established procedures.

Although earlier studies have concluded that Sierra Leone has seen an explosion in the size, reach and work of CSOs, they concluded that most CSOs had weak internal governance and low legitimacy. For example, many CSOs could be characterised as one-person enterprises, with no laid-down procedures for conducting their business. In 2005, a good number of CSOs were found to have no functional boundaries or clear-cut mandate, mostly existing for the purpose of accessing aid; these organisations had a habit of changing mandates to undertake projects for which donor money was available (Sesay and Hughes 2005).

A report for DfID concluded that this behaviour particularly afflicted non-membership, city-based, elite organisations (Jay, Richards and Williams: 2003). The study exempted from this critique what it called 'socially embedded' organisations, which are membership-based. Such organisations were perceived by the study to score better for internal democracy and integrity, and to display greater accountability towards, and representation of, their key constituents than non-membership-based service delivery/development CSOs, as well as city-based civil society groups involved in advocacy, human rights and democracy work.

This is the background against which the institutionalisation of CSOs was agreed on as one of three critical issues for the Sierra Leone CSI-RA. In capturing the extent to which CSOs can be considered as legitimate institutions today, the CSI-RA attempts to assess whether any progress has been made from the situation described in previous reports.

#### ***Internal governance and institutional rules***

The government favours CSOs that are registered, extending to them service delivery contracts and duty waiver concessions. Donors also favour CSOs that are registered when providing service delivery contracts and grants. Consequently, CSOs are inclined to seek registration to benefit from government and donors. Accordingly, 94% of CSOs surveyed in this study are registered.

All registered organisations have constitutions or articles of association that regulate leadership arrangements, administrative and management procedures, the existence and roles of boards of directors or trustees and advisors, and in the case of membership organisations, the privileges and responsibilities of members.

Overall, membership organisations of any type received a relatively high score for internal democracy, as assessed by their adherence to critical practices. All membership organisations have elected leaders, hold at least an annual general meeting and produce some form of an annual report. In the case of civic and service delivery/development CSOs, however, participants felt that there is great divergence between the intents of their governing instruments

and internal governance practices. None of the civic and service delivery/development CSOs surveyed in this study have individual members, which is indicative of a general pattern in Sierra Leone for this type of organisation.

This study concludes that there are many faults in the internal governance of civic and service delivery/development CSOs, including on how they select their leadership, how the actions of leaders are controlled, their practices of managing staff members and recognising the rights of staff members, and the extent to which boards provide oversight. In the opinions of key informants, it is extremely rare for the heads of civic and service delivery/development CSOs to be recruited through competitive processes. Most such CSOs remain headed by their founders, and boards of directors largely exist to meet formal requirements.

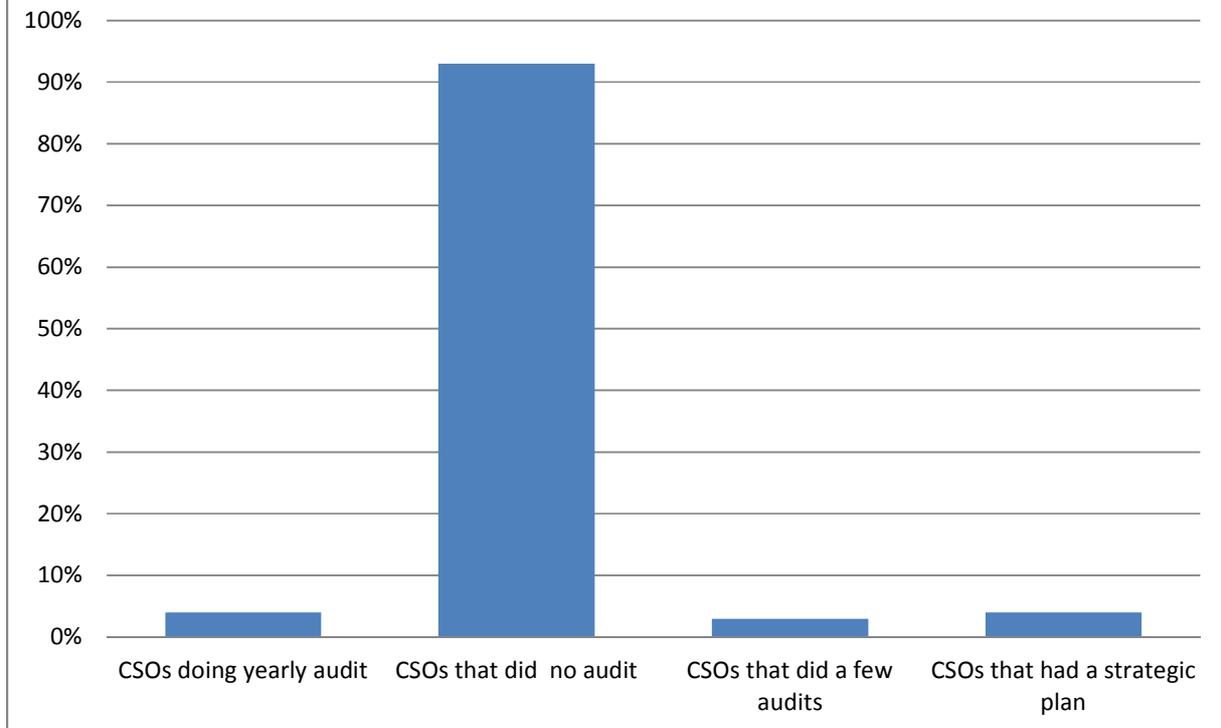
Only a handful of city-based civic and service delivery/development CSOs are understood to give consideration to Sierra Leone's labour laws in their work. The staff members of most such CSOs receive salaries that are tied to short-term projects. Staff can be relieved without termination benefits when an organisation's project portfolio reduces. Most staff members don't belong to unions that could help them seek improved conditions.

Across the board, CSOs do not undertake strategic planning to drive organisational and programme development, leading to operational work and practices that lack consistency. Less than 5% of CSOs surveyed, across all types, carried out some form of organisational assessment or progress review in the last five years. Under 5% of CSOs have a strategic plan, with the figure even lower for professional and social clubs/mutual benefit CSOs.

KIIs indicated a strong desire on the part of civic and service delivery/development CSOs to undertake organisational assessment that could lead to better planning and strategising. However, they face two main challenges. Firstly, civic and service delivery/development CSOs do not have the financial and intellectual resources to address the strategic planning gap. Secondly, these types of organisations may not operate on the basis of strategic plans because they take up assignments as and when opportunities for grants and fees are available.

The lack of a practice of periodic organisational assessment and strategic planning means that heads of CSOs hold the greatest decision making power over what their organisations seek to do.

**Figure 1: Management practices: organisational planning and financial audit**



Source: survey of organisations

In the opinions of a number of key informants, weaknesses persist in CSOs' internal governance partly as a matter of choice by CSO leaders, particularly on the part of non-membership organisations, given that they do not have to be accountable to their members over the way they function and use their funding. The suggestion is that many heads of CSOs benefit materially from internal governance weaknesses in their organisations. As the head of the National Commission for Democracy puts it, "...internal governance weaknesses in many organisations are a comfortable pillar for corruption; and that is the motivation for keeping things the way they are".<sup>2</sup>

### ***Emerging progress***

Although little appears to have changed regarding how leadership is recruited and controlled, civic and service delivery/development CSOs are seeing some institutional improvements in their use of consensual procedures. This implies that controls can be developed over the actions of CSO leaders.

Two positive developments can be identified. First, one expert who was interviewed notes that CSOs are responding to earlier criticisms regarding their internal governance and accountability. The expert suggests that a positive internal governance and accountability profile will yield

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Dr Abu Bakarr Kargbo, Chairman, National Commission for Democracy, 22 July 2013.

better funding relationships with external donors and partners.<sup>3</sup> A second development comes from the changing funding landscape. Some INGOs are now offering multi-year partnerships with Sierra Leonean CSOs to implement projects. In these partnerships, the financial and administrative practices of fund-receiving local CSOs are enhanced. The enhancement of financial and administrative procedures involves trainings and provision of reporting and data gathering templates. Further, as a result of the adoption of rights-based approaches to development, nearly all INGOs now include components in their projects that deal with issues of good governance and human rights. Civic organisations, which are particularly vulnerable to institutional weaknesses, are therefore benefitting from the medium-term partnership approach.

As an example of this new approach, from 2008 to 2011 the Irish Catholic development CSO Trócaire partnered with five local CSOs to implement its Good Governance and Democratisation project.<sup>4</sup> Trócaire provided technical support to the partners in the process of implementing the project, including coaching and mentoring of partners on project design, monitoring and evaluation, and report writing. As part of supporting partners to strengthen their organisational efficiency, Trócaire undertook a systems review of partners in 2010 to identify areas of weaknesses in their financial management systems for remedial action to ensure that systems of control are operational and effective (CSCF).

A major indicator in the past of the institutional weaknesses of CSOs in Sierra Leone was what one study described as their mercenary approach to seeking funds for projects (Sesay and Hughes 2005). The description, as endorsed in FGDs for this study, meant that it was very common for CSOs to take up projects for which there was funding on offer, regardless of organisational fit. A positive trend can now be seen away from this, in the views of key informant interviews and FGDs. Today, CSOs are seen as largely faithful to their mission statements and objectives in the projects and activities they undertake, and stay within specific sectors or activities consistent with their mandates. This, however, has not come about voluntarily, but rather has been forced on CSOs by prevailing circumstances.

The past mind-set of opportunism and elastic mandates was essentially a response to the opportunities of the times. From 2002 to 2004, Sierra Leone had many emergency projects, led by government, donors and INGOs, which responded to post war emergencies.<sup>5</sup> CSOs were repeatedly and hurriedly sought to implement emergency response service delivery and development projects for government, donors and INGOs. Among the many areas that required emergency response were re-settlement of displaced populations, rehabilitation of basic rural infrastructure, community reconciliation and peace-building, trauma healing and psychosocial support, support for children affected by the war, recovery of economic activities, and restoration of civil authority (Government of Sierra Leone 2002).

Many of the service delivery and development areas that required emergency responses have long since stabilised. Many of these areas are no longer part of service delivery and development priorities of government, donors and INGOs, eliminating many opportunities for CSOs to seek grants and contracts. There have been no similar emergencies to attend to since 2007. Further, the devolution process is largely complete, with most service delivery and development obligations of central government now having been devolved to local councils (World Bank 2011). Central government is therefore not contracting CSOs for service delivery

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Lavina Bandua, Executive Director, Transparency International-Sierra Leone, 26 February 2013.

<sup>4</sup> The five partners were CGG, NMJD, the 50/50 Group, University of Makeni and the Center for Democracy and Human Rights.

<sup>5</sup> The adoption of the 2004-2007 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper officially marked the end of the post war transition from relief and emergency responses to sustainable development.

and development work at the same level. Many service delivery/development CSOs that depended on contracts and grants from government, donors and INGOs have closed or are dormant. Many INGOs that were in Sierra Leone to respond to war related emergencies have left.

### ***A weak regulatory regime***

CSOs' institutional weaknesses partly arise from a weak state regulatory framework. State regulation can of course be a difficult issue, as excessive state regulation can be used to limit freedom of association and assembly, and restrict civic space. However, because CSOs are public-facing entities, and often enjoy the goodwill of members of the public, as expressed in donations and in-kind contributions, the state has a role to play in enabling public oversight of their behaviours. Civil society regulation need not necessarily impinge on key civil society freedom. In Sierra Leone, however, the state's regulatory regime has given very little consideration to ensuring the good internal governance and accountability of CSOs. Regulation of CSOs is restricted almost exclusively to the granting of permits and licenses to CSOs to operate.

Different agencies carry out the duty of granting licenses to different types of CSOs. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) registers community-based organisations (CBOs). The Office of the Registrar General registers CSOs as non-profit companies. The Ministry of Youths and Sports registers youth organisations. MOFED registers what it classifies as NGOs. The Ministry of Social Welfare registers mutual benefit organisations, under the category of 'friendly societies'. There is no uniform requirement for registration of CSOs. Generally, to qualify for registration, organisations must have a constitution or memorandum and articles of association, a bank account, office space, and a board of directors or trustees.

Apart from MOFED and MLGRD, agencies impose no obligations regarding internal governance and accountability. NGOs that register with MOFED are required to disclose sources, purposes and uses of donor funds, and submit annual reports (Government of Sierra Leone 2000). NGOs that register with MLGRD are required to submit quarterly reports on past activities, achievements and future programmes. Failure to submit quarterly reports would endanger the renewal of a CSO's certificate of registration (DAI Europe Ltd. 2006). MOFED and MLGRD require organisations registered with them to annually renew their registrations. Beyond these requirements there is no other government consideration in law or practice of CSOs' internal governance and accountability. Sierra Leone has not adopted a composite financial reporting standard for CSOs, although work had started on this at the time of preparation of this report.

Because of the reporting and accountability obligations MOFED places on CSOs, many now prefer to register with the Office of the Registrar General or Local Councils. In any case, CSOs frequently ignore the obligations, and MOFED and MLGRD have little capacity to enforce the rules.<sup>6</sup> It is in the circumstances of a weak state regulatory regime that one-person enterprises can describe themselves as CSOs, and CSOs can exist to implement a small number of projects before becoming becalmed.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Shellac Davies, Executive Director, SLANGO, 2 June 2013.

### ***Limited prospects of self-regulation***

As much as CSOs may have accountability obligations towards the state or donors, they also have obligations to self-regulate. Yet self-regulation initiatives among CSOs in Sierra Leone are rare. No CSOs surveyed has a code of conduct for their staff and no civil society network has a code of conduct for their member organisations.

In 2012 SLANGO articulated what is intended to be a sector-wide NGO Code of Conduct. It has not yet been adopted, but when it is, it will apply only to CSOs that are members of SLANGO. One key informant believes that there is little enthusiasm among CSOs to self-regulate.<sup>7</sup> The head of SLANGO believes that this lack of enthusiasm for self-regulation is keeping many local CSOs from joining SLANGO.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Donor funding practices and dubious CSOs***

CSO leaders have suggested that the approaches of international development partners and government agencies to development work in Sierra Leone still partly buttress CSOs' institutional weaknesses. INGOs and government agencies continue to give funds to organisations that have dubious legitimacy and suspect mandates. For instance, although many heads of CSOs involved with the establishment in 1998 of the Civil Society Movement (CSM) umbrella organisation expressed the view that the network was defunct by 2003, it then implemented an externally funded UK£9,000 project "to promote the participation of women and young girls in the 2012 general elections" (Network Movement for Justice and Development 2013).

There is also evidence that government agencies are still pursuing contracts with CSOs without due diligence. For instance, in 2010 CSM implemented a project for the government's Decentralisation Secretariat to train and develop a checklist for 140 community-level service delivery monitors. This offers an illustration of the practice of giving grants and contracts to CSOs to undertake work on issues outside their mandate, and without concern for their internal governance practices, given that CSM was established to serve as a network for mobilising CSOs in collective action on national issues. Key civil society leaders state that a small group of people now use the CSM brand to mobilise resources for their own ends: in the opinion of one key informant, solely for securing funds from donors.<sup>9</sup> For many civil society leaders interviewed, this offers a vivid example of how donors, government agencies and INGOs can be complicit in CSOs' accountability weaknesses.

Another instance of apparent donor complicity was the funding of a set of CSOs by the United Nations Integrated Peace-building office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) for election related activities in 2012. Many CSO leaders believed that as National Election Watch (NEW) was already leading civil society involvement in the elections, with funding from DfID, it would have been sensible for UNIPSIL to give additional support to the network. Instead, UNIPSIL chose to open a new window for civil society involvement in the electoral process. At a workshop held to validate this report, civil society leaders suggested that the majority of CSOs simply squandered the UNIPSIL funds.

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Joe Pemagbi, Country Director, Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), 31 May 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Shellac Davies, Executive Director, SLANGO, 2 June 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Abu Brima, Executive Director, NMJD, 28 February 2013.

## ***Final comments on institutional issues***

A World Bank Sierra Leone Country Office official has suggested that in the period between the end of the war in 2002 and 2004, when emergency service delivery needs were being responded to, government, donors and INGOs rarely took time to scrutinise the internal governance, mandate, credibility and accountability credentials of CSOs (World Bank 2013). Government, donors and INGOs made it a condition that citizens were organised as associations to partake in certain service delivery and development areas. Consequently, many groups were formed to undertake donor-funded activities. It was in these circumstances that CSOs with questionable internal governance credentials and credibility thrived (World Bank 2013).

With the post-war emergency response period now in the past, the suggestion is that government, donors and INGOS are now in a position to be more diligent and mindful of the characters of CSOs they seek to work with. The extent to which they are doing so in practice is, however, not clear. INGOs and some government agencies are still giving funds to CSOs to undertake projects that are clearly out of tune with CSOs' mandates, which might compromise the quality of the results. Further, that the positive trend away from opportunistic seeking of funding reflects a changed funding environment rather than any shifts in the attitudes of CSOs implies that, if opportunities become available again, CSOs would still be willing to chase funding regardless of mandates.

Finally, according to KIIIs, small, membership-based CSOs often hold ambitions to operate within the ambits of laid-down rules and processes. However, they simply do not have the skills to articulate these rules and processes, or are mostly too poor to do so.

## **5.2 Resources and sustainability**

### ***Background***

CSOs in Sierra Leone face serious resource challenges, according to various studies, which concluded that a large majority of CSOs exist only because of international donor funding (Jay, Richards and Williams 2003; Sesay and Hughes 2005). This made many CSOs susceptible to collapse and dissolution. The CSI-RA's various consultative processes agreed that CSOs' resource difficulties continue to be a major issue that has not subsided since the earlier studies, and therefore needed to be addressed in this assessment.

In looking at CSOs' resources today, this study attempts to assess progress from the situation described in earlier reports. However, it also tries to break new ground by looking into areas of CSOs' practices in resource mobilisation, the role of the state's regulatory regime, and the culture of volunteerism and philanthropy, which have not previously been explored as factors in the weaknesses of CSO resourcing in Sierra Leone.

### ***CSOs' resource capacity profile***

CSOs in Sierra Leone could be divided into two categories according to their ability to obtain resources. There are some CSOs that have a measure of income security. These are those CSOs with members who pay dues, comprising professional associations and social clubs/mutual benefit organisations. This is not to say that their income is sufficient. A second grouping of CSOs have little or no income security and are dependent on grants from donors. In this category are civic and service delivery/development CSOs. Organisations of this

type struggle to meet recurrent administrative and operational costs, and as a general practice they meet their overheads by taking between 5% and 10% of total project costs when they receive funding.

In general, CSOs in Sierra Leone have very weak resource capacities. From the various parts of the research, it becomes clear that civic, service delivery/development and social clubs/mutual benefit CSOs are generally unable to maintain permanent paid staff, and are not in a position to employ the best people, or invest in staff development. The majority of civic and service delivery/development CSOs cannot afford to own vehicles, computers or other equipment necessary for regular operations. Only 30% of CSOs surveyed have computers, only 4% have a website and not one was using social media or mobile applications as part of their regular work. Beyond the capital city, the most valuable equipment available to grassroots membership CSOs is the cell phone.

Generally, only professional associations have the resources to meet recurrent administrative and operational costs. As a general practice however, and not related to resource considerations, professional associations employ few staff beyond secretaries and office assistants. Individual members elected to positions in the executive tend to run the affairs of these associations. It is civic and service delivery/development CSOs that are run by hired, paid staff, and these organisations tend to employ people with university degrees and diplomas. However, hardly any provide their staff with professional training opportunities. Further, tertiary institutions in Sierra Leone do not offer courses on civil society issues. The main professional improvement opportunities available to CSO staff members therefore come outside their CSOs, in the form of programme related workshops, and local and international conferences and seminars, which are driven mostly by the availability of donor funding.

### ***CSO resource mobilisation practices***

CSOs' weak resource bases in Sierra Leone partly reflect narrow resource mobilisation practices. Generally, CSOs in Sierra Leone do not supplement their income with revenues from services and products, or rent from assets. Among CSOs surveyed, this study did not reveal a single civic or service delivery/development CSO that has raised funds in the last five years outside of grants from donors. Conversely, membership organisations rely principally on membership dues as their major funding source and rarely receive grant support.

Membership CSOs also occasionally organise fundraising events. However, fundraising beyond membership dues is not common for professional associations. Only the SLTU has meaningful fundraising activity outside membership dues, such as income from a hotel it owns in Freetown. Other professional bodies hold annual dinner events from which they receive some revenue. All grassroots, self-help and social clubs/mutual benefit CSOs surveyed organise fundraising events at least once a year.

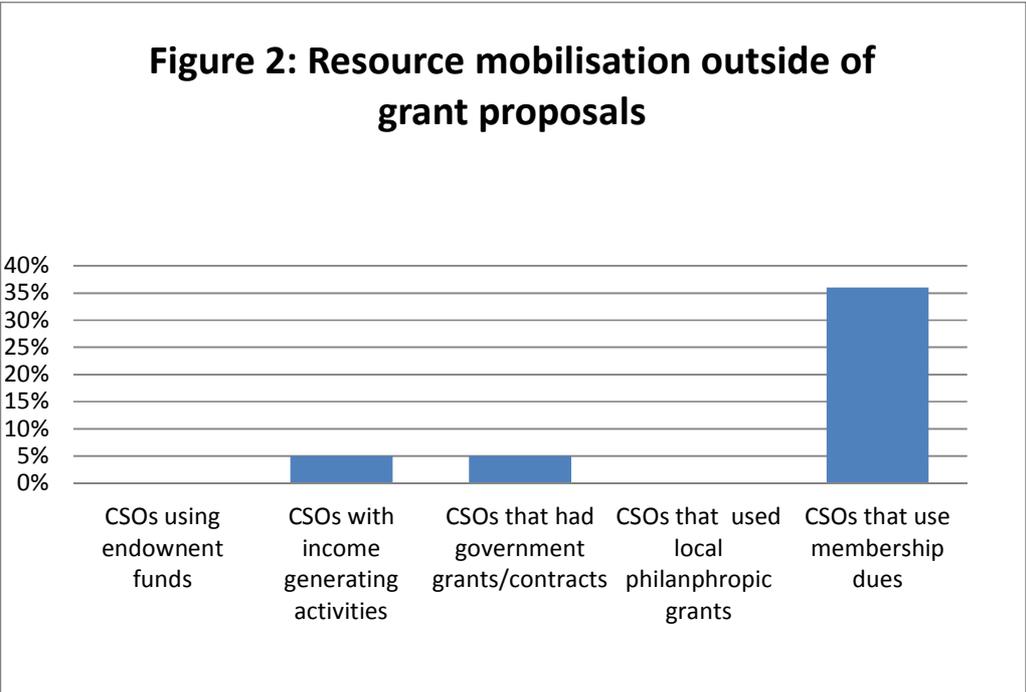
CSOs raise funds from outside Sierra Leone by submitting project proposals. Civic and service delivery/development CSOs rely exclusively on this form of resource mobilisation. Professional associations, grassroots, and self-help and social clubs/mutual benefit CSOs very rarely seek funds by submitting project proposals.

**Weak philanthropy and volunteerism culture**

The culture of philanthropy in Sierra Leone does not favour voluntary giving to CSOs. Except for membership organisations, local sources of funding do not constitute any significant proportion of CSO funding.

There are three main areas of philanthropic activities in Sierra Leone: churches, mosques and schools receive local philanthropic donations from individuals and businesses; individuals make philanthropic donations to the communities they hail from; and businesses make local level donations. Often these philanthropic gestures reflect the political ambitions of the individuals.

According to FGD participants and KIIs, these philanthropic practices towards communities, churches, mosques and schools are not channelled through CSOs, and it is very rare for CSOs to receive or seek financial and material support from local philanthropic sources. Equally, CSOs rarely seek or receive voluntary and non-monetary support from local communities and constituencies. There is no CSO in Sierra Leone known to receive funding from a local endowment fund, and there is no endowment resource specifically available for the benefit of CSOs.



Source: survey of organisations

**Funding practices of international development partners**

While resource mobilisation strategies of CSOs in Sierra Leone are narrow and restricted, other factors contribute to low resource bases. Donors have made a huge contribution to the survival and vitality of CSOs in Sierra Leone, but some of their approaches are seen as unhelpful.

According to FGD participants, international development agencies generally see CSOs as agencies to be contracted, on a need by need basis, for delivering projects, and as a way of disbursing funds. Given this approach, almost all grants that CSOs receive go to meet direct

project implementation costs. Grant givers generally only allocate between 5% and 10% of total project costs to a recipient CSO to cover administrative costs, and rarely do CSOs receive core funds to support their organisations. CSOs in Sierra Leone can seldom be said to have a long-term financial support relationship with a funder, as grants are mostly for a period of one year; multi-year grants to CSOs are rare.

Grants made to CSOs are generally quite small, and insufficient to sustain a CSO. For example, grants awarded to CSOs in 2013 by ENCISS and the Non-State Actors project of MOFED typically ranged between US\$5,000 and US\$50,000: ENCISS grants ranged between US\$5,000 and US\$30,000, and in the Non-State Actors project, between US\$9,000 and US\$60,000. Very few CSOs have enjoyed multi-year grants in excess of US\$150,000 during the last five years. A combination of factors, including CSOs' limited capacity to absorb large funds, and CSOs' and donors' short-term approaches to development, account for the tendency towards small, limited-term grants.

International institutions also appear averse to providing direct capacity building support to CSOs. It is extremely rare for any CSO to receive direct technical, material and equipment support in the forms of computers, vehicles and other hardware. In the rare cases that CSOs receive these, they are almost always related to the implementation of a project.

This study identified two exceptional instances of support to CSOs that was not tied to the implementation of projects. One CSO, the Center for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL) has received a non-project tied grant from the Fund for Global Human Rights since 2010. The grant goes towards meeting the cost of travel by their staff members around Sierra Leone, development of strategic plans, monitoring and evaluation, salaries and other recurrent expenses. In the second instance, the umbrella CSO, Sierra Leone Union of Disability Issues (SLUDI), has received administrative grants from Handicap International, an INGO, for several years. In the case of CARL, the organisation is benefiting from a particular funding strategy employed by the donor. For SLUDI, there are very few funding windows in Sierra Leone for disability issues, and it can be assumed that the donor realises that without recurrent funding, it would be difficult for the coalition to raise funds from other sources.

The recent advent of multi-year partnerships between INGOs and local CSOs was discussed earlier. However, these are not yet a widespread practice.

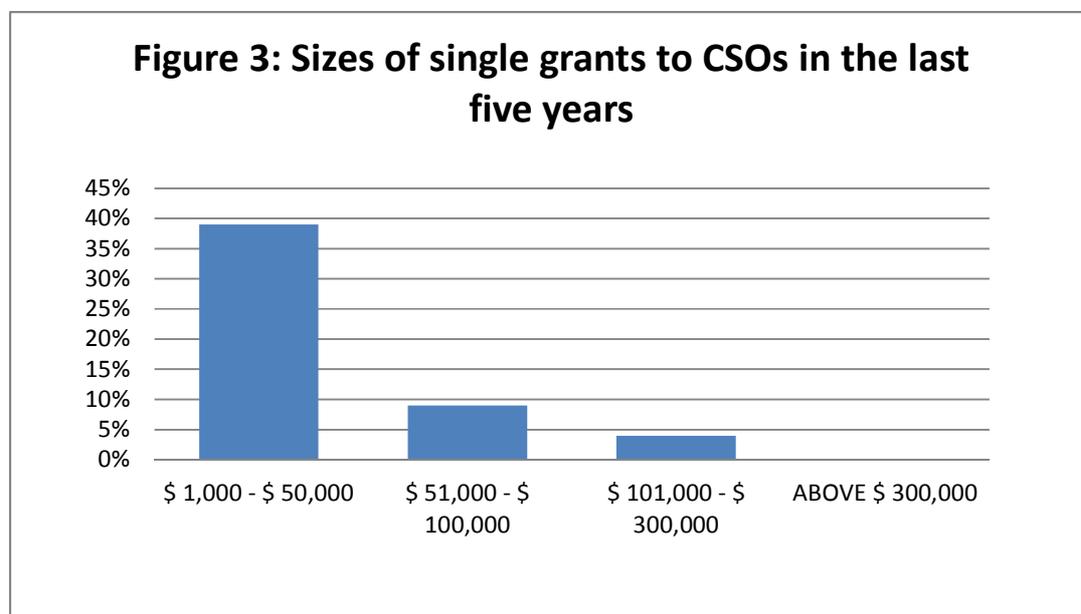
### ***Emerging in-country intermediary grant giving opportunities***

Another important recent development is the emergence of some country-based intermediary institutions dedicated to providing resources to CSOs, although as noted above, most grants given are insufficient to sustain a CSO. The DfID supported programme on Enhancing the interface and Interaction between Civil Society and the State to Improve Poor People's Lives (ENCISS), has worked in Sierra Leone since 2005. The programme seeks to bring citizens' inputs into dialogue on public policy-making and implementation around poverty reduction issues. In 2011 ENCISS began a programme of making small grants to local CSOs and government agencies. The Sierra Leone country office of the Open Society Institute for West Africa (OSIWA) has also been making grants to CSOs since it opened in 2011. Further, in 2011, MOFED began the Non-State Actors project to support civil society activism around public financial management and accountability. The Non-State Actors project is a component of a larger Integrated Public Financial Management Reform project supported by various multilateral financial institutions. The project made its first grants, to 15 CSOs, in May 2013. OSIWA,

ENCISS and MOFED's Non-State Actors project generally provide one-year grants, although on some occasions, OSIWA has given 18 month grants.

Over the last five years, despite the small size of the grants, the three most important sources of funding for CSOs have become ENCISS, OSIWA, and MOFED's Non-State Actors project. In 2013, 70 CSOs benefitted from ENCISS' grants, while the total grant fund of MOFED's Non-State Actors project was US\$472,919, distributed between 15 CSOs. Prior to these in-country opportunities, CSOs mostly sought grants from institutions based abroad.

The presence of in-country grant-making programmes is seen across civil society as a positive development. However, in-country grant opportunities highly favour CSOs involved in democracy and governance activism, as is the case with the three noted. Professional associations, mutual benefit CSOs, CBOs and CSOs that emphasise service delivery do not have access to similar in-country funding opportunities.



Source: survey of organisations. Currency: US\$

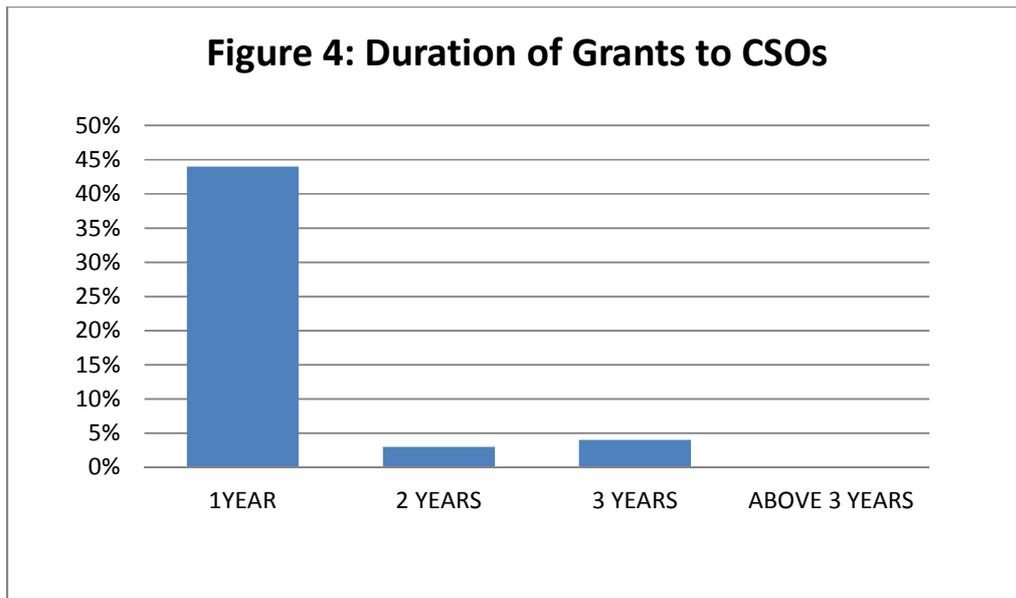
### ***Limitations of the legal and regulatory environment***

In Sierra Leone there are no government restrictions on funding to CSOs. However, as discussed earlier, the legal and regulatory framework for CSOs is very narrow. The study noted that in some other countries, the legal and regulatory framework extends to providing preferential taxation treatment for CSOs, including tax exemptions on CSO income and donations towards CSOs. This can encourage philanthropy. Another good practice in support of CSO resourcing is subsidiarity. In many countries in Europe, the principle of subsidiarity means that social and economic tasks, and educational and cultural assets, are being devolved to civic organisations (Open Society Institute).

In Sierra Leone the legal and regulatory framework does not cover most of these issues. There is no specific tax regime for CSOs. It is a practice that CSOs do not pay taxes on grants and endowments, but this is not laid down in law. The law does not provide tax deductions for

individual or corporate donations to CSOs, which does not give an incentive for private support to CSOs.

A CSO can get exemption from customs duties for goods imported to promote its work, but the privilege is mostly granted to CSOs that provide direct social and development services, such as CSOs working on issues of agriculture, education, health and water and sanitation. These exemptions are discretionary and not regulated by law.



*Source: survey of organisations*

### **Resources: final comments**

Weak resource bases generally affect the efficiency and effectiveness of CSOs of all types in Sierra Leone. This research did not however seek to identify the extent to which the narrowness of CSOs' resource mobilisation strategies results from lacks of skills, exposure or willingness to diversify. The issue needs to be explored further, because there are emerging examples of INGOs raising money in Sierra Leone outside of grant proposals. For instance, in 2012, more than UK£250,000 was raised for the UK registered charity Street Child through a marathon run in Sierra Leone. The question is, can local CSOs adopt similar strategies? And would they be as successful?

Weak resource bases have most negatively impacted on the sustainability of civic and service delivery/development CSOs. The consequences of over-reliance on donor grants and contracts could be observed during this assessment. In KIIs and FGDs, participants recalled high profile civic and service delivery/development CSOs that no longer exist because of lack of funds. MOFED also has in its database a long list of defunct service delivery/development CSOs. These CSOs depended on donor grants and contracts from state agencies that were responding to the immediate post-civil conflict emergencies between 2002 and 2004.

## 5.3 Networking and collaboration

### **Background**

Sixty per cent of CSOs in this study belong to networks. Although a number of assessment studies have been done on civil society in Sierra Leone, there has not to date been any specific study of networking and collaboration among CSOs. A few studies have commented on networking and collaboration issues, including the 2006 CSI, which concluded that although a considerable proportion of CSOs belonged to umbrella organisations, networking was poor and umbrella organisations were ineffective (CGG and CIVICUS 2006). The same year, the National Scoping Study of Civil Society Organisations Activities in Sierra Leone reported that, while a few effective networks and issue-based advocacy initiatives existed, the civil society landscape was characterised by a proliferation of umbrella organisations. It found that individual organisations tended to register with a range of networks and attend different meetings, which involved expending financial and human resources. Executive structures of networks were ineffective, it also found, and prone to confusing their roles with those of their member organisations (DAI Europe Ltd. 2006).

The perception that there is an increasing number of civil society networks suggests continuing enthusiasm among CSOs for networking, cooperation and coalition building. On this basis, this was selected as an issue to be explored in this study.

The CSI-RA interrogated the quality of CSOs' networking and collaboration, while trying to track any progress made since the earlier assessments. Issues of CSO networking and collaboration were examined at two levels: at a general level, as expressed through CSOs' exchange of correspondence, attendance at other CSOs' meetings, formation of partnerships for implementation of projects and sharing of intellectual and material resources; and a second level, where the networks established by CSOs themselves were explored, with a focus on networks' internal governance practices, the quality of their approaches to work and resource dynamics. Findings were drawn largely from KIIs, FGDs and a review of organisations' documents.

### **General interaction and cooperation among CSOs**

Interaction and cooperation among CSOs outside established networks is generally low; exchange of correspondence and attendance at other CSOs' meetings are rare and occasional. There is broad agreement among civil society leaders that CSOs mostly attend other CSOs' meetings if there are resource sharing opportunities, but because opportunities for sharing resources are rare, there is little interest in meetings in general. Among CSOs surveyed, no two CSOs have jointly implemented a project in the last five years or come together to apply for grants to start joint initiatives.

According to information from KIIs, FGDs and the NAG, professional associations rarely consider interacting with civic and service delivery/development CSOs, and the same can be said in reverse. Leaders of civic and service delivery/development CSOs believe that, further, professional associations rarely interact with other CSOs even of their own type.<sup>10</sup> At the workshop held to validate this report, officials from other categories of CSOs expressed the view that professional associations do not consider themselves as part of civil society.

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<sup>10</sup> First meeting of the National Advisory Group, 24 August 2012.

### ***Impetus behind platforms and networks***

CSO networks in Sierra Leone have four origins. First, networks emerged as civic responses to the circumstances of the 1991-2002 war. Sierra Leone's earliest human rights organisations, in seeking to leverage collective action, established the National Forum for Human Rights (NFHR) in March 1997.<sup>11</sup> CSM, discussed above, was established in 1998 to provide a platform for collective action to influence peace negotiations and settlements between different factions in Sierra Leone's civil conflict.

A second and greater cause spurring the emergence of networks has been increased civil society engagement with social accountability. Among CSOs, international development partners and government, as can be evidenced by the CSO grant schemes outlined above, there has been growing momentum behind the notion that development and service delivery impact can be improved by strengthening citizens' demand-side accountability. Networks have emerged to try to coordinate the social accountability work of different civil society actors.

A particular emphasis in social accountability work is the management of economic resources. The Sierra Leone Network on the Right to Food (SiLNoRF) and Action for Large-scale Land Acquisition and Transparency (ALLART) were formed in 2008 by CSOs in response to a spate of large-scale acquisitions of land by foreign companies. In the few years before the formation of SiLNoRF and ALLART, research showed that foreign companies had acquired 500,000 hectares of land. In a country where 70% of the population is said to depend on subsistence farming, concern about the negative impacts on livelihoods and the environment from the acquisition of land by foreign corporations for non-food, export-oriented commercial agriculture gave stimulus to SiLNoRF and ALLART.

Other examples of social accountability networks include the Natural Resource Governance and Economic Justice Network (NaRGEJ), founded in 2010, which brings together CSOs working on social accountability issues in areas such as land, fishery resources, environment, mining, petroleum and public financial management; and the Women's Forum on Mining and Extractives (WiME), which evolved in 2008 to focus attention on the needs of women in the mining industry. Social accountability work around the management of public funds has also seen CSOs conducting independent analysis of the budget, monitoring expenditures made from public funds and evaluating public services. On this issue, Budget Advocacy (BAN) was formed in 2005, bringing together a number of CSOs.

Third, networks have also emerged as a response to the complexity of civil society in Sierra Leone. A sense of disillusionment with the undemocratic nature of existing civil society networks gave birth to Civil Society Alternative Process (CSAP) in 2004.<sup>12</sup> In 2002, many youth groups came together to form the National Youth Coalition to serve as an alliance for advancing the status of young people and promoting youth interests.<sup>13</sup> SLUDI, mentioned earlier, emerged out of concerns that the various organisations representing people with disabilities needed to coordinate their activities, and be in a position to speak with one voice when the need arose. In a further example, CSOs expanded their activities by taking on election observation duties in the multiparty presidential and parliamentary elections in 2002, something that until then had largely been the preserve of international organisations.<sup>14</sup> They established NEW to coordinate this.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Joseph Rahall, former Chairman, NFHR, 7 March 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Fallah Ensah-Ndayma, National Coordinator, CSEP, 20 March 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Ibrahim Turay, Western Area Coordinator, National Youth Coalition, 26 March 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Joseph Rahall, former Chairman, NFHR, 7 March 2013.

As a fourth reason, networks have emerged in response to the encouragement of international agencies. For instance, every United Nations peace-building or conflict mediation mission in Sierra Leone between 1998 and 2007 organised and maintained a coalition of human rights organisations. The establishment of networks such as BAN, Children's Advocacy Network and the Health for All Coalition was urged and supported by INGOs working in Sierra Leone. At the workshop held to validate this report, participants stated that international organisations' habit of facilitating the establishment of networks was partly cutting across the coalition building efforts of Sierra Leonean CSOs. This suggests there is a need for greater sensitivity by donors to understanding what efforts currently exist, and working with them.

### ***Networks' internal governance***

Internal democracy is felt to be weak in the majority of networks in Sierra Leone. For example, nine of the 15 networks examined for this study have never changed leadership since their establishment, and 12 out of the 15 state that they meet 'only when necessary'. This suggests that dialogue among members is low. A key challenge that networks face is their vulnerability to capture by a minority, most usually either by the institution that facilitated their establishment, or that which provides the secretariat. This sentiment was expressed across key informant interviews and FGDs. It is also common for networks to compete with their members for resources. In many cases it is the secretariat or organisation hosting a network that secures funds and implement projects.

The collapse of two networks that were once powerful illuminates some of the problems of weak internal governance and accountability. At their high point, CSM and NFHR offered key platforms for collective action by CSOs to influence peace settlements. The two networks were well respected locally and internationally. CSM's problems began in 2003, when a quarrel broke out amongst members over the use of a grant of US\$87,800 provided by the Canadian Catholic Organisation for Development and Peace (de Zeeuw and Kumar 2006: 167). In the disagreement, disillusioned members left. Many civil society leaders who were founding members of CSM stated as part of this study that CSM effectively ceased to function as a network thereafter.

NFHR collapsed in similar circumstances: its secretariat dominated and it did not adequately keep members involved. It was also seen that the network was seeking funds to implement projects and programmes without the involvement of its member organisations. One study listed NFHR as among the largest recipients of human rights funding between 1999 and 2006 (de Zeeuw and Kumar 2006: 168). This meant that the network was effectively in competition with its members over donor funds and training opportunities. Disagreements over this led to a withdrawal of membership and loss of interest in the network, causing it to become defunct in 2009.

### ***The quality of networks' work***

CSO networks in Sierra Leone have potentially three main areas of work:

- Advocacy and lobbying: to seek influence over laws and public policies;
- Empowerment: initiatives that help strengthen the position of their members;
- Service delivery: provision of services to the public as part of development.

The study focuses particularly on the advocacy and lobbying role of networks, on the basis that, as many individual CSOs lack the capacities and expertise for effective advocacy and lobbying, this could be a key added value of networks. However, opinions are mostly that networks are largely failing to meet the challenge of developing and mobilising constituencies in advocacy and lobbying. None of the networks examined have established structures for engagement with communities, such as concerned citizens' groups, or set up representative bodies in the course of their advocacy and lobbying work. Nor are they using participatory action-oriented research methods as a way of gathering community input. Networks also perform badly in providing public information about their work: only two out of the 15 networks in this study have a website, only three take part in radio programmes and none produce a newsletter.

This study also finds that much of the advocacy and lobbying work of networks is of poor quality; the aims of advocacy and lobbying generally are poorly articulated. CSO networks apparently find it difficult to measure the change they seek, except in cases where legislated outcomes are intended. Out of the 15 networks consulted, only one had clearly articulated advocacy aims.

That network is BAN, which at the time this report was being prepared was conducting a study on Sierra Leone tax expenditure to determine the amount of revenue the government has foregone through tax incentives granted to investors over the past five years. Ultimately, the study aims to expose areas of weakness in the government's taxation policies to serve as an evidence base for advocacy and lobbying. BAN was also undertaking advocacy and lobbying to redress the faults indicated by Sierra Leone's low score for budget transparency in the 2012 Open Budget Index.<sup>15</sup>

This study also finds that networks rarely undertake research to gather evidence to use in advocacy and lobbying; out of the 15 networks only BAN offered an example of linking research to advocacy, with its involvement in the Tax Justice Network to produce the Sierra Leone Tax Report in 2012.

Further, networks do not fully capitalise on the potential of their membership in international platforms. All the networks included in this study have linkages with international coalitions and organisations, usually in the form of membership or some other formal association. Networks use international level platforms mostly as sources of training and non-material capacity building, rather than as part of an advocacy and lobbying strategy. Again BAN provides the only example of collaborative, international level work in the past five years, in its involvement with the Tax Justice Network's publication of the Sierra Leone Tax Report in 2012.

CSOs interviewed considered that networks should help to provide their members with resources to be able to contribute to a common cause. There is therefore general dissatisfaction at the tendency of networks to operate as distinct organisations that pursue external funding in competition with their members. There is also a widespread feeling that networks do not help to strengthen their members.

### ***Networks' resources***

Networks experience the same resource challenges and apply the same resource mobilisation practices as individual CSOs. Networks largely rely on grants from donors. Grants tend to be for the implementation of specific projects. Out of the 15 networks examined only one, SLUDI, had

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Abu Bakarr Kamara, Coordinator, BAN, 4 March 2013.

annual support from a partner towards its administrative costs. No network enjoys a long term funding relationship with a donor or partner. As with individual CSOs, equipment support to networks was linked to that required for the implementation of projects, and was not directly intended to build their material and equipment capacities.

Illustrating the limited emphasis CSOs in general in Sierra Leone place on self-generated revenue, only two of 15 networks, NFHR and SLUDI, required financial subscriptions from their members. However, in the case of NFHR, the network became dormant because of non-payment by members, while in SLUDI's case, members do not pay regularly.<sup>16</sup>

### **Networks and membership duplication**

The 2006 DfID study concluded that there was duplication of roles and issues of focus between different networks. As well as noting the tendency of individual CSOs to register with a range of networks, the report stated that in some cases new networks have been created without any prior mapping of existing structures (DAI Europe Ltd. 2006). The present study confirms this tendency towards multiple, overlapping networks. The land rights advocacy sector offers an example, with several networks having similar mandates and activities, and criss-crossing memberships. For example, the Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD) is a member of NaRGEJ and ALLART. Green Scenery is a member of ALLART, SiLNORF and NaRGEJ. SiLNORF, which is a 25-member coalition, is itself a member of ALLART, a nine-member network.

The implication of multiple coalitions working on similar issues is that the efficiency gains that should result from collaboration are diminished, competition for resources is stoked and impact is reduced. Compared to this, the issue areas of elections, youth, human rights and disability have only one network each, which could suggest greater efficiency, but which could also be interpreted as suggesting these are not considered by CSOs as high priority areas for collaboration.

**Table 1: Duplication of civil society networks<sup>17</sup>**

		Land use	Public finance management	Election	Mining	CSO coordination	Youth	Media	Human rights	Women	Disability
1	ALLART	x									
2	BAN		x								
3	Community Radio Network (CORNET)							x			
4	CSAP					x					
5	CSM					x					
6	NEW			x							
7	NFHR								x		
8	NaRGEJ	x	x		x						
9	SLANGO					x					
10	SiLNORF	x									
11	National				x						

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Santigie Kargbo, ex officio, SLUDI, 2 March 2013.

<sup>17</sup> As classified by FGDs and validation workshop participants.

	Advocacy Coalition on Extractives										
12	National Women's Forum									X	
13	National Youth Coalition						X				
14	SLUDI										X
15	WiME				X					X	

### ***New examples of networks***

There are, however, more encouraging examples of networks. KII's suggest that two networks, BAN and NEW, are widely considered as good examples that command broad respect. Member organisations seem generally satisfied with the benefits of joint working in these networks, which are seen to have good practices in internal governance, collective action and implementation of projects.

NEW began in 2002 as a platform for coordinating civil society's contribution to election oversight. It has a membership of 324 organisations, including local and international CSOs, and is organised at chiefdom, district and regional levels. This decentralised structure encourages greater ownership and involvement at different levels. National meetings of the coalition are held four times a year, making it one of the few networks to regularly and frequently consult its members. NEW has observed all public elections since its formation. Due to the experience it has developed, in the 2012 elections DfID supported the network with almost UK£2m under the Civil Society Engagement in Electoral Processes (CSEEP) project, the largest grant ever given to an organisation in Sierra Leone for governance promotion work.

BAN was formed in 2005 by local and international CSOs involved in advocacy of various kinds around the national budget. BAN has seven member organisations and six 'strategic partners'.<sup>18</sup> BAN takes a collective approach that gives each member policy-making responsibilities, the right of oversight of activities and an active role in the implementation of projects. BAN has an Executive Committee made up of the heads of its member organisations and an Operational Committee comprising two staff members of each member organisation. According to civil society leaders involved in the network, this arrangement for democratically sharing responsibilities and oversight is the source of the network's strength.

BAN's approach to advocacy also indicates the application of good practices in working as a coalition. It has analysed financial policies and national budget statements since its formation. Ahead of the 2012 general elections, BAN and its strategic partners developed a manifesto on health and convinced the six main political parties to incorporate its provisions into their party manifestos. That same year, the national budget presented to parliament for approval proposed a decrease in the allocation for health from 11% in 2011 to 7.4 % in 2012. BAN mobilised to reverse the decrease, conducting a Health Budget Tracking Survey to support the argument for maintaining funding to the health sector. Eventually the budgetary allocation for health was set at 10.5% of the national budget in 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Strategic Partners is a term used by BAN to refer to those organisations that it collaborates with to implement projects.

### ***Final comments on cooperation and advocacy***

The ability and willingness of CSOs to collaborate and network is a critical component in realising civil society's potential to exercise accountability over development and service delivery. By working together, CSOs should have greater voice and leverage than when acting as individual organisations. However, a range of challenges, including resource constraints, weak internal governance of individual organisations, skills gaps and competition for resources between CSOs and networks work against CSOs' ability and willingness to collaborate.

CSOs mostly come together to use the power of collective action to make demands on the state. However, suggestions emerged from this process that some CSOs pursue actions that are more likely to endear them to the government rather than making accountability demands, which further limits the ability of CSOs to cooperate effectively.

Many CSOs hesitate to play an accountability role, and this limits their perceptions about the need to work with counterparts, and their ability to do so. For instance, the Chief Adviser of the Dollar Men Association in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone, made the point in an interview that his organisation emphasises its support for the political party in power, in order to avert any "harm from government" to their operations.<sup>19</sup> The same sentiment was expressed by the Deputy Chair of another grassroots traders' organisation, while the Secretary General of the NP Women's Organisation stated that their group was more inclined to support the government than demand rights.<sup>20</sup>

A number of expert informants suggested that professional associations also neglect to play this civic role.<sup>21</sup> One stated that, "...even on matters that affect their profession, professional associations hesitate to demand accountability from the state."<sup>22</sup> Other informants concluded that this was one of the reasons why professional associations see little reason to work with other CSOs. The same is the case with social clubs/mutual benefit organisations, which are not in the habit of making civic demands on the state. The picture this suggests is of a divided and disconnected civil society. Civic and service delivery/development CSOs are left to play the role of demand-side engagement with the state, which may account for their greater tendency to form coalitions and networks.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Allieu Kamara, Chief Adviser, Dollar Men Association, 4 March 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Abibatu B Dumbuya, Secretary General, NP Women's Organisation.

<sup>21</sup> Interviews with Joseph Rahall, Joe Penagbi, Valnora Edwin and Abu Brima on different dates.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Joe Pemagbi, Country Director, OSIWA, 31 May 2013.

## **6. Conclusions and recommendations**

### **6.1 Conclusions**

Expectations are huge for CSOs to help promote good governance, service delivery and development in Sierra Leone. The government's expectations for CSOs are set out in the National Recovery Strategy Paper (2002-2003) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers 1, 2 and 3. International donors, in prioritising contracts and grants for CSOs as part of national recovery efforts in the period after the war, similarly illustrated the expectations they placed on civil society. While contracts and grants for CSOs are now declining, the expectations on CSOs to play a role in good governance are increasingly being pursued through demand-side accountability projects and programmes.

There is however a mismatch between the expectations placed on CSOs, and CSOs' readiness to fulfil them. Larry Diamond (1999) has argued that a politically active public matters for democracy only when it is organised, structured, principled, socialised to the norms and values of democracy, and committed not just to narrow interests but to larger, common 'civic ends'. Institutional challenges within CSOs mean that they are in good measure lacking these attributes. The good news is that a number of studies have been carried out to assess the nature and scope of capabilities of CSOs in Sierra Leone to produce positive changes. The bad news is that no comprehensive strategy or programme has evolved with the aim of making improvements on the basis of the findings of these studies.

In illustrating the health of CSOs today, the CSI-RA has shown what progress has been made in tackling the capabilities, abilities and orientation challenges of CSOs that were identified in prior studies. The CSI-RA is intended to draw attention to the need to invest in CSOs so that they can serve as vehicles for citizens to participate in good governance and development. The recommendations that follow seek to set out how CSOs can be supported in these roles.

### **6.2 Recommendations**

#### **a. Building CSOs as institutions**

##### ***Support for strengthening CSOs' internal governance***

It is recommended that support be given to building CSOs' internal governance, including that of networks and coalitions.

Most small membership organisations have ambitions to operate within the ambit of laid-down rules and procedures, but do not have the skills to articulate these. Sometimes, guidelines are crudely articulated, as is particularly the case with smaller CSOs. More generally, many weaknesses in management procedures in CSOs and coalitions emanate from a lack of documented guidelines that can be followed.

Support should be given to help develop solid, coherent and easy to use administrative and governing instruments. Support should also be given to articulating the duties, responsibilities, rights and roles entailed in operating a CSO or coalition, and also to encouraging innovation in models of representation and accountability. Other areas of support could include the provision of templates for areas such as developing and implementing articles of association, methods of reporting to members and codes of ethics.

### ***Incorporate strengthening of internal governance systems of CSOs in multi-year project implementation partnerships***

CSOs' multi-year relationships with INGO partners for project implementation should include a component for strengthening management and internal governance systems.

As a collateral benefit of partnerships, CSOs are having their institutional capacities strengthened by INGO partners, which desire better financial management, monitoring and evaluation responsibilities from their partners. If a local CSO is going to have assured funding through a project implementation partnership for a number of years, it is reasonable that the funding partner should increase the prospects for accountability and efficiency by improving the CSO's internal controls and related systems. CSOs could incorporate systems strengthening into their applications for grants, or INGOs could make systems strengthening a condition for long-term funding partnership.

### ***Enhancing the regulatory environment that supports CSOs' internal governance and accountability***

The legal and regulatory framework for CSOs should be expanded such that it has capacity to leverage the improved internal governance and accountability of CSOs. Among the issues to consider are the harmonisation of registration requirements, and the possible establishment of a single national agency for registering CSOs that is accessible to the public and incorporates organisational support as part of its mandate. An enhanced regulatory framework would also address issues of the dissolution and liquidation of CSOs, enjoyment of direct and indirect benefits, reversion of assets, reporting, and adoption of standard accounting obligations. It should be a guiding consideration that all regulatory obligations are easy to comply with and monitor.

### ***Donors should leverage incentives for CSOs to invest in good internal governance***

The international donor community largely sustains civic and service delivery/development CSOs, in particular. This study therefore recommends that grant-giving international organisations begin building in assessments of CSOs' internal governance and mandate credibility in grant-making decisions. At the same time, any internal governance credit scorecard should not be overburdening. It could include simple checks, such as that board meetings are being held, CSOs and their leaders have not been found wanting in financial matters, and CSOs are adhering to laid-down rules and procedures for financial management and administration.

Regarding mandate credibility, donors should be able to ensure that a CSO does not have serious divergence in its activities. For instance, a CSO with a mission to support the rights of persons with disabilities but which dedicates a large proportion of its time to implementing funded breast-feeding projects would be suspicious. International donors could even consider issuing CSOs with project completion certificates, indicating levels of satisfaction with implementation. Donors should consider linking core funding to the improvement of organisational structures and functions.

### ***Pursue an agenda for a donor collaborative framework for addressing CSOs' institutional weaknesses***

As this study has shown, the behaviour of donors partly nurtures the environment in which the institutional weaknesses of CSOs continue. Donors need to acknowledge that CSOs are not merely good channels for delivering aid, but key actors in Sierra Leone's development processes. Donors should therefore take on some of the responsibility for addressing CSOs' institutional weaknesses through a collaborative framework. There is a need to support CSOs through a comprehensive capacity development strategy. Such a strategy could set mutually agreed benchmarks and rules for funding CSOs, a system for referencing the character of CSOs, and a mechanism for checking for duplication of the objectives of CSO projects, among other issues.

#### **b. Building CSOs' resource bases for effectiveness and for the long-term**

##### ***Prioritise multi-year project funding relationship between donors and CSOs***

CSOs should as a priority seek project implementation relationships with donors and partners that spread over multiple years. CSOs can take a lead in this by articulating projects in medium and long-term timeframes when seeking donor support. Donors should begin to extend such opportunities. As noted above, a number of INGOs working on governance and human rights issues are now experimenting with medium-term project implementation relationships with CSOs. CSOs and donors over a wider field can learn from these experiments.

##### ***Provide CSOs with support to expand their resource mobilisation options***

CSOs can never be effective and sustainable when they rely on narrow revenue sources. It is therefore recommended that CSOs invest time and effort in expanding their resource mobilisation strategies, with support from different stakeholders such as government, donors, other CSOs and the private sector. While it is often suggested that CSOs need to look at other ways of raising funds, this would be made easier if their experiments were actively supported. Methods for supporting CSOs to expand their resource mobilisation options could include training, exposure to good practices and support to engage with social media. Multilateral organisations and international foundations that support CSOs in Sierra Leone could be encouraged to open funding windows specifically to address these issues.

##### ***Support for CSOs' long-term material capacity***

CSOs in Sierra Leone should be actively targeted with capacity building support in both technical and material aspects. Multilateral institutions and international foundations investing in CSOs in Sierra Leone should therefore be lobbied to provide capacity building programming, including providing training, hardware and template systems for financial management and administration. In the few instances that CSOs have been supported with hardware as part of multi-year projects, they have continued to use such hardware beyond the lifespan of the projects they were meant to serve. There is sustainability value in building the material capacity of CSOs.

##### ***Enhancing the legal and policy environment to support CSO resourcing***

The government should enhance the legal and policy environment such that it supports the resourcing and operations of CSOs. As noted above, the legal and policy environment is

inadequate in areas such as tax preferences and concessions. The legal and policy environment is also weak in encouraging philanthropy. CSOs need to undertake advocacy work to encourage the government to fill gaps in the legal and policy environment for CSO regulation to redress these issues. Networks should particularly take the lead in this, as they should be able to work on a civil society-wide level.

### **c. Enhancing networking and collaboration**

#### ***Build a supra-platform for CSO collective action and networking***

The findings of this study suggest it would be optimal to create a supra-platform for bringing CSOs together to speak with one voice on critical national issues, and potentially to develop self-regulation initiatives. With previous attempts having collapsed, CSOs have no overarching mechanism for amplifying their voices and mobilising collective action to respond to national challenges. Lessons should be learnt to avoid a repeat of the past failures of networks. From KIIs and FGDs, there is agreement that any new mechanism for collective action and networking should not take on a project implementation role, but only serve as a platform for networking, collaboration, mobilisation and collective engagement with power holders in response to national challenges.

#### ***Addressing network duplication and supporting their long-term viability***

Key to the future effectiveness of networks is the need to address the duplication of mandates and memberships. A step towards addressing duplication of mandates could involve investigating the sectors in which networks and platforms predominate, and auditing which networks or platforms are working in which areas, and which organisations are members of different networks that are dealing with the same issues. Overlapping networks should be encouraged to harmonise, with the incentive of developing more sustainable structures, through deeper training in advocacy, lobbying, collectivism and coalition building.

#### ***Bringing professional associations and community-based mutual benefit CSOs into the networking fold***

This study has identified a lack of interest in networking and collaboration by professional associations and community-based mutual benefit CSOs. This situation has to be addressed in order to contribute to a more harmonised and complementary civil society arena. There is a need to articulate a deliberate strategy to encourage professional associations and community-based mutual benefit CSOs into networking and cooperation with other CSOs. A good start could be to sensitise these groups about the benefits of joint work and collaboration, and to create new opportunities and incentives for networking and cooperation.

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