

## **Annex**

### **Social and Institutional Appraisal**

#### **Background**

**1.1** The recent conflict in Sierra Leone saw the disappearance of most state services and local government structures from rural areas. What had begun as a small incursion in 1991 by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) from neighbouring Liberia grew into a brutal campaign of terror against civilians that cost an estimated 50,000 lives and, at its height, forced almost half of the country's 4.5 million people to flee their homes. An estimated 2 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) remained in Sierra Leone in 2001, with an additional 450,000 refugees in neighbouring countries.

**1.2** A massive international effort to assist Sierra Leone got underway as the conflict was drawing to a close. Combatants were disarmed and demobilised and offered places on education vocational training schemes, civilians were offered food relief and farming packages, infrastructure and some private housing was repaired and assistance was provided to many areas of government activity. Immense social and economic problems still remain. According to UNICEF, per capita gross domestic product in Sierra Leone stands at \$510, the infant mortality rate is 18.5% and average life expectancy at birth is 39 years. Nearly 70% of the national labour force is engaged in primary food production and most of these live in small villages scattered across the landscape. The adult literacy rate is 31% (45.4% for men, 18.2% for women).

#### **Historical Legacies**

**2.1** In Sierra Leone, the administration of justice and law and order is performed by several different agencies. A hierarchy of courts administer modern law (Supreme Court, High Court, Court of Appeal and Magistrate's Court), Local Courts administer customary law, and chiefs preside over informal courts. Secret societies and other ritual associations also have special laws and particular methods of punishing offenders. Village elders, compound heads and religious leaders (especially imams) also arbitrate in intra-community disputes and are often relied upon to report criminal offences to higher authorities. The Sierra Leone Police (SLP), the Chiefdom Police, Chiefdom Councillors and a variety of informal action and vigilante groups provide law enforcement and safety and security for the public. The operational spheres of these various agencies often overlap, and some are in direct competition with one another.

**2.2** The current complexity of Safety, Security and Access to Justice (SSAJ) provision in Sierra Leone is partly a legacy of British colonial rule. A justice and policing system based on the British model was introduced in the Sierra Leone Colony in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the Sierra Leone Protectorate, attached to the Colony in 1896, was a designated sphere of 'native authority'. Chiefs were left with primary responsibility for maintaining law and order at the local level, and presided over Native Courts administering customary law. A small staff of British administrators took charge of cases involving serious criminal offences and all cases involving 'non-natives' (i.e. Krios and non-Africans). These cases were either heard by the British District Commissioners themselves or referred to a

Circuit Court presided over by a Puisne Judge who came up from Freetown once or twice a year. Later in the colonial era, many of the jurisprudential responsibilities of District Commissioners were transferred to magistrates formally qualified in law, although district administrators were still serving as acting magistrates in some areas in the 1950s. After Independence, Magistrates' Courts were established in each of Sierra Leone's twelve provincial districts and continue to serve as Sierra Leone's primary inferior courts of judicature.

**2.3** In the 1930s, authority over Native Courts was transferred from chiefs and headmen to Court Presidents (later, Court Chairmen) appointed by the colonial administration with the approval of the local populace. However, it was not until the late 1950s that it became a matter of government policy not to appoint Paramount Chiefs as Court Presidents. Towards the end of the colonial era, a partial modernisation of chieftom administration was attempted. Included in this process was the devolution of power from the Paramount Chief to a council of elders and community leaders (Tribal Authority, renamed Chieftom Council after Independence). This council was given authority to pass local byelaws on a range of both customary (e.g. marriage) and non-customary (e.g. the issuing of trading and artisanship licenses) matters. In 1963, the Native Court was reconstituted as a Local Court administering both customary law and local byelaws and having jurisdiction over all persons within its territorial sphere. Two years later, responsibility for the Local Court system was transferred from the Ministry of Judicial Affairs to the Ministry of the Interior (forerunner of the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development) and remains under the local government portfolio up to the present day.

**2.4** The Colony and Protectorate of Sierra Leone were united under a single administrative umbrella in 1951, but the SLP did not become operational in the Provinces until 1954. Before that time, small numbers of locally recruited Court Messengers served each District Office, while Paramount Chiefs were left to make their own safety and security arrangements. As their name suggests, the main duties of the Court Messenger force were to call witnesses and serve summonses on behalf of the District Commissioner's Court, although they were legally empowered to perform 'all duties as are usually performed by a Civil Police Force or Constabulary'. By the 1930s, it had become clear that with increasing urbanism and mining activity in the Protectorate, the need had arisen for a properly trained, modern police force. Police-trained detachments of Court Messengers were subsequently deployed in Bo township and some diamond mining areas, although the Protectorate Assembly (a forum of Paramount Chiefs) was extremely reluctant to see any further deployment. When the introduction of the SLP into the Provinces was finally approved, central government felt obliged to issue a carefully worded statement:

*One of the primary duties of the Paramount Chiefs is to maintain law and order in their chiefdoms and to prevent crime. In the Protectorate as a whole...the Chiefs will retain this function unchanged, parallel with the Police. In the rural areas administered by the Chiefs, the responsibility will continue to lie with them as far as they are able to exercise it. Where they require assistance over matters within their jurisdiction, or where the Provincial Administration in consultation with the Police judge that more effective measures are required, action*

*will be taken by the Police. Otherwise, Police visits to a chiefdom will normally be for the actual pursuit of an offender, investigation of crime in which a non-native is a party or dealing with serious crime outside the jurisdiction of a chief.*

Even in urban areas, it was anticipated that the SLP would take on the ‘technical work’ of crime detection and traffic control whilst sharing with chiefdom authorities the duty of protecting life and property.

- 2.5 The deployment of the SLP into the Provinces was accompanied by the disbandment of the Court Messenger force. Yet the latter service became the model for the Chiefdom Police, first recognised in law as the ‘Chiefdom Messenger’ service in 1952. Like its forerunner, the Chiefdom Police force was recruited and trained at the District Office and deployed in the chiefdoms to provide a security and bailiff service for the Local Courts. Chiefdom Police were also expected to provide security for Paramount Chiefs and visiting government functionaries. In the 1970s, the government of Siaka Stevens considered developing the Chiefdom Police into an internal security and intelligence-gathering organisation, but opted instead for a centrally recruited force trained by expatriate Cubans and Chinese.

### **Current Patterns of SSAJ Provision**

- 3.1 The Government of Sierra Leone, DFID and other international donors have expended considerable energy and resources in rehabilitating the SLP and Magistrates’ Courts. This effort has been successful in many respects. While the SLP has yet to shed fully its historic reputation for corruption (especially in Freetown), it has regained a high profile directing traffic, inspecting vehicles, investigating accidents, and keeping order in public places. Another important role is citizens’ advice. Members of the public regularly approach SLP officers for advice, confident that they are literate and knowledgeable on matters of state bureaucracy. For many, the SLP also represents the only hope of free transport to hospital in cases of medical emergency. However, the current sphere of SLP operations is limited to the towns and major roads. Its reach into the deep countryside is minimal.
- 3.2 The design function of the Local Courts and Chiefdom Police was to take up the main burden of formal SSAJ provision in the countryside, but both services were badly run down long before the civil war. Salaries for Local Court staff and Chiefdom Police are low at the best of times, but deficiencies in financial administration at both the chiefdom and district level mean that salary payments are often delayed, sometimes indefinitely. Many Local Court functionaries have other means of livelihood, and only come to work when there are enough cases on the books to warrant a sitting. Cases often take several months to resolve due to delays in serving summonses and collecting witnesses, and case notes are often hastily scribbled into school exercise books and kept on the private premises of the Court Clerks. Local Court functionaries frequently pocket revenue from fines and summoning fees in lieu of salary and expense payments. Many serving Chiefdom Police officers lack uniforms and equipment and the service is struggling to replace personnel lost to the war and natural wastage. Many officers are extremely reluctant to serve summonses in isolated areas for fear of violence.

As they seldom receive salary payments or travel expenses, Chiefdom Police officers frequently demand upfront fees from plaintiffs before taking any action.

**3.3** Many communities in the Sierra Leone countryside are effectively self-policing, with much justice administered by the hierarchy of Village, Section and Paramount Chiefs. While female chiefs are elected in some areas, customary authority at the local level is strongly patriarchal. Elders and community leaders regularly adjudicate minor domestic disputes, but chiefs also preside over extra-legal courts for which summoning fees are charged and fines and other punishments meted out. For example, in one chiefdom in northern Sierra Leone the standard rate for a 'country summons' to a Village Chief's court is 500 Leones (£0.15). The same chiefdom's Local Courts charge 5,000 Leones for a summons and levy further charges for 'hearing', 'service' and 'stationary' that push protagonists' potential expenses (should they lose a case) towards 20,000 Leones before any fines are taken into consideration. Many rural Sierra Leoneans find the latter sum difficult to come by. For them, the advantage in taking cases to a chief rather than the Local Court is that justice is comparatively cheap and quick.

**3.4** However, in recent years there has been increasing public disquiet over the magnitude of fees and fines charged in some chiefs' courts and Local Courts. A common allegation is that the fines handed down are grossly incommensurate to the offences committed and that the local justice system has become a corrupt, moneymaking exercise. The details of such alleged abuses rarely come to light, but some Paramount Chiefs are known to demand in excess of 100,000 Leones (£30) from each protagonist to hear disputes over customary rights to land. Such cases are usually treated extremely seriously, with Paramount Chiefs consulting widely before reaching a decision. Yet record keeping in such cases is often lacking and it is not unusual for a Paramount Chief to adjourn a particularly problematic case indefinitely without ever refunding the hearing fees. While chiefs' courts are no longer recognised in state law, it is virtually unheard of for any rank of chief in rural Sierra Leone to be prosecuted for presiding over an illegal court.

### **Cultural Factors**

**4.1** Cultural factors also influence demand for SSAJ in Sierra Leone. The instinct and preference of most rural people is to administer justice within the family and community. The central principle of indigenous jurisprudence is that an offender should make an unequivocal admission of guilt in the presence of a chief or family head and 'beg' the victim (or the family thereof) with a compensational payment and pleas for forgiveness. A victim who continues to bear malice against an offender once forgiveness is granted may court greater moral opprobrium than the offender. Sierra Leoneans argue that the fundamental concern underlying these practices is the maintenance of good community relations. People living together in a rural village are invariably relatives by marriage or descent, and they have to get along with each other come what may. When a perpetrator pays compensation and begs forgiveness for a crime it allows people to put the incident behind them. For that reason, the practice of 'begging' is not considered immoral even when it seeks absolution for an offence that, under the Western system of justice, would demand the severest punishment.

- 4.2** Deep culture underlies these sentiments. While Sierra Leone has several indigenous ethnic groups, they share much in the realm of hereditary culture. According to traditional belief, human beings are affected by a multitude of unseen powers. These powers have intelligence and, in some cases, emanate from human beings in the course of their daily lives. Regulating these powers is therefore a process of socialisation. For example, while making a charm or 'medicine' may require some technical expertise, it is only believed to work if it is spoken to in a certain way and if the owner goes on to observe certain laws and protocols. These may include abstinence from sexual relations for a prescribed period or refraining from commenting on the heat of the sun at any time when within view of a particular landmark. Even broken and apparently discarded domestic implements can, with appropriate persuasion, be made to serve as deadly magical traps for trespassers and thieves. An outsider may therefore have no idea as to the precise powers emanating from particular object or the true purpose behind apparently mundane social behaviour. The general principle here is that different kinds of social behaviour are believed to create the conditions in which different powers flourish.
- 4.3** The secret societies take this principle a stage further. By meeting in seclusion, excluding non-initiates, and refusing to talk about their affairs in public, the societies activate a parallel world that facilitates control over particularly important or dangerous powers. The laws and protocols of the society not only regulate access to these powers, but are also considered necessary for maintaining the efficacy of the charms and medicines that contain these powers. The most prominent Sierra Leonean secret societies control powers in fields – warfare, hunting, witch finding, and childbirth – that, historically, were primary concerns for small and scattered village communities. They are indexed to the powers of males and females generally and nowadays male and female interests in any given community tend to be identified with a single pair of dominant societies. Poro (male) and Bundu./Sande (female) serve in this capacity in many parts of Sierra Leone, and in the deep countryside all of the adult population will be initiates.
- 4.4** According to traditional belief, children only become fully adult, and acquire the rights and responsibilities attached to that status, by undergoing rituals that confirm the separation (yet complementarity) of male and female powers. These rituals involve the removal of all traces of sexual ambiguity from their bodies. Initiates are operated upon by members of their own sex and are thereafter instructed in the powers, prerogatives and social responsibilities specific to their sex. Much initiation ritual takes place in strict seclusion. But while there remains a strong religious and cultural rationale for secret society initiation, they are also explicit instruments of social control. Secret society laws and protocols are taken extremely seriously. An initiate who breaks the oath of secrecy is believed to die automatically, because his or her life is bound to the society and secrecy is one of the conditions that guarantees the efficacy of the powers that help to create every adult person. Even in the towns non-initiates may feel obliged to obey society decrees because they have no specific protection against the forces controlled by the society.
- 4.5** Nothing prevents local community leaders – chiefs and elders – from activating society laws and protocols in order to control other activities, both ritual and

secular. For example, society protocols may be activated to protect the investiture of a chief or deter trespassing on fields and gardens. Furthermore, many acts that are considered criminal offences in modern law – e.g. murder, rape, assault, affray, and theft – are also violations of the laws of both male and female secret societies. In extreme cases, an offender may be tried by local community leaders under the aegis of the secret society and sacrificed to assuage the powers that he or she has violated. But because the local community is considered a product of the proper observance of both secular and ritual law, and because the chief represents that community in all of its aspects, it is usually deemed sufficient that an offender begs for forgiveness before the chief and pays a penance in money or in kind. The secret societies play a leading role in the maintenance of social order in rural Sierra Leone and underpin the authority of chiefs of all ranks when they exercise extra-legal jurisprudence.

### **Conflict and Social Change**

**5.1** The recent conflict has had many social repercussions. Conflict-induced displacement was especially traumatic for rural people due to their reliance upon customary property and citizenship rights, guaranteed in each locality by chiefs. Many were - and still remain – profoundly shocked by the vicious and apparently motiveless attacks upon civilians by the young Sierra Leoneans who fought under the banner of the RUF, and there is still much talk in rural areas about these fighters’ fearless transgression of secret society laws as they entered village shrines in search of hoarded weapons and food. Some commentators argue that the civil war reflects a schism between increasingly secular and modernised Sierra Leonean youth and forces of conservatism in the government and the chiefdoms. From the conservative viewpoint, these fighters were indeed out of control in both a literal and cultural sense. During the conflict itself, militias on both sides used initiation ritual – traditional, secular, or a mixture of both – as an instrument of conscription. While the pro-government *kamajoi* militia self-consciously employed traditional rituals that specifically excluded women, the far more secular RUF recruited many female combatants. Since the cessation of the conflict, re-establishing the familiar social order has been a priority for many. NGO workers have reported mass initiations of girls in the refugee camps, and UN peacekeeping forces reported forcible initiation of male RUF ex-combatants in Makeni in February 2002. Later that year, members of the Poro society in a northern town with a large refugee population were reported to be seeking out all orphaned boys for initiation. Those that refused the call were being denied access to local farmland.

**5.2** Many among the Sierra Leone’s modern elite continue to identify strongly with their rural home communities. Sending sons and daughters back to the village for initiation is one way of honouring these commitments and reproducing these local identifications among the next generation. Many within the growing Sierra Leonean diaspora in the UK and America retain similar sentiments. A return to the old ways is not everywhere welcome, however. The nuclear family is gaining ground among the urban middle classes and many are finding succour in Christian churches at the charismatic end of the spectrum. Many Sierra Leoneans professing the Christian or Muslim faiths are active in traditional religion, but the charismatic churches tend to preach strongly against the secret societies and all forms of ‘juju’. Even in rural areas, the traditional view that a girl should marry as

soon as she completes her Bundu/Sande education is beginning to fall by the wayside. Modern education is not free in Sierra Leone, but the importance of educating girls as well as boys is now widely acknowledged. In spite of this, chiefdom authorities continue to demand 'marriage licences' from the parents of girls who have recently completed initiation. Such demands generate considerable resentment in cases where the girl is still attending school. It is therefore becoming a common strategy to delay a girl's initiation until she has completed her schooling. In this respect, modern concepts of social maturation are beginning to challenge the old. At the same time, increasing numbers of rural women are now demanding equal rights with men in parental decision making, property holding and political representation. NGO rights education programmes have had some influence here, but experiences of wartime displacement have also left an indelible mark. During the conflict, families were scattered and many women were left to support young families on their own. Those that managed to survive successfully find the prospect of a return to domestic subservience once husbands return distinctly unattractive.

- 5.3** The situation with ex-combatants is also complicated. At first sight, post-war reconciliation and reintegration has been highly successful. Many RUF ex-combatants, male and female, now live peaceably in rural communities among former members of pro-government militias. Some former RUF combatants have even taken up positions as local youth leaders and now cooperate closely with chiefdom authorities. Yet tensions are visible under the surface. Many civilians see the vocational training and monetary benefits offered to ex-combatants by the government and international donors as rewards for evil doing, and also harbour bitterness towards local 'collaborators' who willingly served the occupying RUF forces. Furthermore, rural youths who served in (or identified with) the civil defence militias during the war have seen a moment of power and importance pass away. Many now resent their renewed subservience to chiefs - especially those chiefs who sat out the war in the comparative safety of the refugee camps and now expect them to muster for unpaid 'communal labour'.

### **Competing Pathways to Justice**

- 6.1** Long experience of corruption and patrimonial politics has left many Sierra Leoneans extremely distrustful of state functionaries. In spite of this, the patronage of the wealthy and powerful is seen as a major weapon in the daily struggle to escape from poverty. This uncertain environment encourages adherence to customary (informal) jurisprudence since any incident that gives a family 'bad name' may threaten its place in patronage networks and provide opportunities for rivals. Even among established families in Freetown, the first reaction when news arrives member is in Police custody is to arrange for bail and to find the accuser so that 'begging' negotiations can begin. In some locations, the SLP have become so used to seeing witness statements withdrawn as informal negotiations get under way that they encourage protagonists to resolve the matter privately whenever the alleged offence is minor. Yet, it is a common belief among the urban poor that every town in Sierra Leone has at least one 'big-man' who has an understanding with the SLP and who arranges to have any case against favoured local citizens dropped in exchange for money. Another popular view, especially in Freetown, is that anyone with the enough money and the right contacts can obtain forgeries of land deeds, birth certificates, and other legal

documents. Attempting to win a case in a formal court is seen as a lottery and protagonists often prefer the alternative strategy of battling for local community opinion. Here, family loyalty is considered paramount and little moral leeway is given to those who might prefer to pursue the more abstract principle of truth.

**6.2** The same attitudes underlie continuing public patronage of chiefs' extra-legal jurisprudence. In an environment where ruthless pursuit of self-interest among the comparatively wealthy and well educated is perceived to be the norm, chiefs emerge as a lesser of two evils. There is at least some chance that hereditary chiefs can be prevailed upon to protect the hereditary rights of their subjects. Chiefs' extra-legal courts remain effective when the disputes are minor and when all parties are integrated into the local community. But even in the remote rural areas one finds increasing numbers of people who, by reason of social background, education, or mode of livelihood, are no longer fully integrated into communities governed by chiefs.

**6.3** The Local Courts provide a vital jurisprudential service for these marginal agents even if this was not their main design purpose. Recent research on Local Court records from two northern chiefdoms (Magbema and Biriwa), indicates that the majority of people bringing cases are men and women engaged in commerce and operating outside their home communities. Most recorded cases concern either the recovery of loans and property from local citizens or the settlement of boundaries of land plots bought from local families for house building.\* Plaintiffs' statements often indicate that they had originally brought complaints to the attention of Village Chiefs, but that these authorities had failed to resolve matters to their satisfaction. In some cases, the dispute involved a third party who resided outside the chiefdom and in others, Village Chiefs themselves had been found in possession of some of the disputed property. There are also indications that 'stranger' plaintiffs preferred to take land disputes to Local Courts rather than chiefs' courts because the former gave greater credence to documentary evidence. Both men and women also brought matrimonial disputes to the Local Courts. Men tended to sue for the return of locally born wives who had gone back to live with their natal families, whilst women tended to sue for divorce against husbands who had gone away on business and neglected to maintain them. The Local Court also initiated cases, issuing fines to local artisans for failing to take out licences as demanded by Chiefdom byelaws. In one of the chiefdoms, there were even cases where Village Chiefs sued members of their own communities for 'sacrilege': e.g. brawling in the village yet refusing to pay the traditional penance when the chief demanded it.

**6.4** The sample is small, but this research suggests that while the Local Courts were established for the purpose of administering customary law for a largely illiterate rural population, they now function as local civil courts administering justice according to a range of legal and moral principles. Magbema and Biriwa chiefdoms both have populations in excess of 30,000, yet the records collected from their Local Courts indicates that no more than one new case per month was

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\* Strictly speaking, chiefdom land is inalienable except for mineral exploitation but the law is often circumvented by an arrangement whereby the seller deems the land a 'gift' for which the buyer pays a 'begging' or 'respect' fee.



brought before court between March 2002 and May 2003. It is possible that many cases have gone unrecorded, and it is likely that the caseload of the Local Courts is much higher in more urbanised and diamondiferous areas in southern and eastern Sierra Leone. But it is noteworthy that the senior Court Clerk in one of the chiefdoms in question complained bitterly that the Paramount Chief was regularly intercepting cases (especially land disputes) destined for the Local Courts and hearing them in his own court. The public consultations managed by the DFID Chiefdom Governance Reform Programme during the final months of the civil war also report intense competition among chiefs to hear cases in some southern chiefdoms, often with added competition from civil defence militias claiming priority for their own 'society' laws. These reports only serve to emphasise the intimate relationship between judicial authority and *de facto* political authority in the Sierra Leonean countryside. Yet, one of the contradictory legacies of the late colonial era is that while chiefs are still expected to maintain law and order in rural areas, they have control over none of the established legal instruments for enforcement or judicature.

**6.5** Historical legacies foster competition within other SSAJ sectors. For example, just as those less integrated into communities governed by chiefs may prefer Local Courts to chiefs' extra-legal courts, those with comparatively greater resources may prefer to take a case directly to the Magistrate's Court or petition the Magistrate to take over a case originally heard in a Local Court. Unlike Local Courts, professional legal representation is permitted in Magistrate's courts. Magistrates can also call upon the services of customary law experts. All of the district headquarters where magisterial sittings take place are also chiefdom headquarters. Transfers of cases from one court to the other tend to generate considerable resentment among Local Court functionaries, due in no small measure to perceived loss of revenue. District Officers (exact equivalents of the colonial District Commissioners) also complain about the transfer of land tenure cases to Magistrates' Courts because it was their historic responsibility to keep records of boundaries and byelaws and adjudicate disputes. But the great attraction for plaintiffs in transferring a case from one court to another is that it may provide a new emphasis or perspective on the question of legal liability. For example, if a child dies from blood loss during an initiation operation, the person who performed the operation is not considered responsible under customary law. Yet secret society initiators (especially women) have been tried and convicted for manslaughter in Freetown courts.

**6.6** The current organisation of SSAJ in Sierra Leone enables plaintiffs to sample different pathways to justice until they find the best opportunity for winning. Here, relative wealth and education is a tremendous advantage and it is perhaps not surprising that one of the recurrent concerns emerging from the public consultations managed by the DFID Chiefdom Governance Reform Programme was the usurpation of chieftaincy positions by clients of powerful metropolitan politicians. The current SSAJ environment tends to magnify vulnerability among people – notably ex-combatants and IDPs – who lack both financial resources and strong family support networks. Such people are placed at a considerable disadvantage in informal jurisprudence, yet may also lack the wherewithal and social confidence to take a case the Local Court or the SLP. Females are doubly disadvantaged in this respect. Under customary law, a man is entitled to strike his

wife and children for even minor acts of disobedience. But if his behaviour becomes overtly abusive his wife is entitled to move back to her family home and ask her father or elder brother take up the matter on her behalf. That option is denied to aid-dependant internal refugees who continue to live outside their home areas. In some places, post-war economic hardship is so acute that householders are unwilling to offer support even to family members who have fallen victim to domestic violence. The vulnerability of women and girls to sexual violence is magnified for the same reason. Casual prostitution is widespread in Sierra Leone, but some rural women are now reporting that post-war hardship has caused some men to resort to rape or exploitation of very young girls. Household heads who already consider a victim of sexual violence a marginal member of their family and an unwelcome burden on their resources tend to be amenable to traditional 'begging' whatever the gravity of the offence.

**6.7** From a practitioners' point of the view, the highly compartmentalised organisation of SSAJ provision presents barriers to reform. For example, the SLP have responded to the problem of domestic and sexual violence against women and girls by setting up Family Support Units in each provincial district. These are staffed by female officers and deal specifically with cases of domestic and sexual violence. An NGO, International Rescue Committee, also has a programme for paying legal costs on behalf of alleged victims in these cases. Despite a heavy caseload, these Units currently have a very limited capacity. Furthermore, SLP personnel tend to take the view that they deal with state law while the chiefdom courts and police deal with customary law. At present they have little or no professional cooperation with the Chiefdom Police, nor indeed the numerous neighbourhood vigilante groups that are springing up in the towns to combat an increasing problem of armed robbery. In this respect, Sierra Leone currently differs from other post-conflict countries (notably South Africa) that have attempted to harness local militias and vigilante groups for auxiliary policing.

**6.8** In the final analysis, post-war Sierra Leone is full of complex and changing social currents. Some people are seeking a return to old ways, while others are embracing modernity and individualism. A common denominator, however, is the gulf between the educated urban elite and the rural masses. Developing a SSAJ system that serves all Sierra Leoneans equally and impartially remains an enormous challenge.