Using Knowledge in Security Sector Reform (SSR) Policy: The Influence of Research on British-led SSR in Sierra Leone

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1. British-led SSR policy in Sierra Leone

2. First Period: ‘fire-fighting’ solutions:
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   - Institutional pathways
   - Use of research

3. Second Period: post-conflict years
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   - Institutional pathways
   - Use of research

4. Lessons from Sierra Leone: what use of research in SSR policy?
1. British–led SSR policy in Sierra Leone

- 23 March 1991: RUF invades from Liberia
- March 1996: Elections. Kabbah in power
- 25 May 1997: AFRC/RUF coup (Koroma). Kabbah in Guinea. ECOMOG intervention
- January 1999: AFRC/RUF offensive in Freetown
- October 1999: UNAMSIL Peacekeeping Operation
- 30 November 1996: Abijan Peace Accords
- 1998: Kabbah reinstated. UNOMSIL
- July 1999: Lomé Peace Agreement
- April 2000: ECOMOG leaves. RUF captures UN peacekeepers
- May 2000: UK intervention. Abuja agreement
- 2007: Elections (Koroma)
- 2012: Elections (Koroma)
2. First Period: ‘fire-fighting’ solutions

■ The context:

“On our arrival we found Freetown in complete disarray and still in a state of virtual war. The functions of state were practically collapsed, with ministries in confusion and officials lacking clear aims and direction”

“Freetown was a devastated city. You had people living in the streets, it was awful: no water, no electricity, very little food, very difficult place to live”

“I walked into an empty building and about three people in there, who hadn’t really an idea of what they were doing. [...]. There must be about 5 people in there. Three of those I had to get out, because they were just political placements”
2. First Period: ‘fire-fighting’ solutions

- **Institutional pathways:**
  - **SSR policy and research agenda starts in late 1990s with the Labour government**
  - **Direct relationship with researchers (Dylan Hendrickson, Nicole Ball – not always used for research)**
  - **Efforts toward a joined-up approach, with some difficulties (Different ethos and values; different chains of command; different location of IMATT)**
  - **High amount of freedom from headquarters**
  - **Importance of personal relationships for policy making**
  - **Direct UK role in Sierra Leone policy making**
2. First Period: ‘fire-fighting’ solutions

- Use of research:
  - No role for research in the decision to intervene
  - Lack of a pre-planned strategy – events shaping policy on the ground more than research (i.e.: decision to maintain the paramilitary; size of the Army)
  - Importance of personalities on the ground and of their experience, rather than of research
  - Use of anthropological/historical books, or ad hoc, operational research, rather than academic research from universities (Bibliography Background Brief; IMATT Verification Team; CPDTF A4 sheets and commissioned research)
  - Ideas and models coming from other experiences
  - Barriers: no existence, no access, no technology
3. Second Period: post-conflict years

The context:

- Lift of the Presidential State of Emergency in Spring 2002
- Increased security in the country (presence of more 17,000 peacekeepers until 2005)
- Reformed, reinvigorated, and new-born Sierra Leonean security institutions (MoD, Intelligence)
- Three peaceful Presidential elections, with change of ruling party
- Reorganisation of some SSR programmes in the country (JSDP staffed by locals and in Moyamba: more security and more capacity)
- Security falling among the priorities; very low Human Development Index
3. Second Period: post-conflict years

- Institutional pathways:
  - *Progressive institutionalisation of SSR policy and research* (tri-departmental policy briefs and strategy; Stabilisation Unit; research centres and network hubs: GFN SSR, GSDRC; commissioned research; international centres)
  - ‘Post-hoc rationalisation’ of events on the ground
  - DFID opening of the office in Freetown: problems in transition, even among programmes (division of police in JSDP and SILSEP, difficult passage from JSDP to AJSP)
  - Three layers: HQs, country offices, contractors and subcontractors
  - Advisory, mentoring, supporting role for the UK
  - Collaboration with other donors in the country (UN, World Bank, European Commission)
3. Second Period: post-conflict years

- Use of research:
  - Increased uptake and use of research (more time, access, availability)
  - Examples of use of research: JSDP; ASJP; IMATT perception study; IMATT direct use of SSR book; ONS collaborations
  - Formal and informal professional relationships with trusted researchers (Paul Jackson, Peter Albrecht, Richard Fanthorpe)
  - Under-use of local researchers (Fourah Bay College; sometimes used as consultants, but mixed accounts)
4. Lessons from Sierra Leone
What use of research in SSR policy?

- On the use of research in fragile environments:
  - Context stability and institutional paths as two main variables determining, shaping, and modelling the influence of research into policy
  - Dynamic interactions between researchers and policy-makers
  - Increased number of channels for knowledge and research (Experts, research institutes, academic institutions at international and British level; Intermediaries: knowledge brokers, FCO analysts; Informal channels)
  - Use of research depending on a person’s attitude
  - Not necessarily more importance to British-commissioned research
4. Lessons from Sierra Leone
What use of research in SSR policy?

- On the use of research by different departments:
  
  - **DFID:**
    
    Emphasis on evidence-based policy
    Appetite for deeper, long-term research
    More funding to commission research
  
  - **FCO:**
    
    Need for political knowledge of actors, interests, power balances in country
    Interested in short-term political dynamics, rather than in long-term development trajectories
  
  - **MOD:**
    
    Use of short and operational pieces of research
    Problems of turnover and holding rail
    SSR discourse through military training and education
4. Lessons from Sierra Leone
What use of research in SSR policy?

- On the barriers to the use of research:
  - **Time:**
    - *No much time for researchers to carry out research (difficult access, expectations, short policy timeframe)*
    - *Lack of time for policy-makers under pressure to show quick results*
    - *Mismatch between research and policy timeframes*
  - **Lack of access, availability, resources, funding, capacity, and materials**
  - **Excess of choice**
  - **Lack of understanding and interest for research** “not sufficiently plugged into the realities of what people are facing on the ground”
4. Lessons from Sierra Leone
What use of research in SSR policy?

- On the peculiarities of SSR research hindering its uptake into policy:

  - Specific nature of the discipline: very technical, difficult to have influential concepts
  - Lack of theoretical as well as empirical bases: Rooted on liberal state building assumptions, failing to capture the peculiarities at micro-level
  - Conservative mind-sets of security actors; Sensitivity of the issues
  - Political and governance dimension of the discipline
  - Lack of clear definition (i.e.: justice and police actors)
  - No definition of success; no evidence of ‘what works’
4. Lessons from Sierra Leone
What use of research in SSR policy?

- On policy-makers’ use of research:
  - Rarely direct influence of research on policy, but more often through osmosis and seepage of concepts
  - Justificatory, political use of research - defence mechanism?
  - Interest for quantitative data
  - Awareness of critical literature

- On the existence of ‘two communities’:
  - Perception of antagonism from research community
  - Research prescriptions not working in reality
  - Research interested in problems rather than solutions
  - Mixed views from researchers (some saying policy is not open to criticism, others emphasising collaboration)
Thank you very much!