

# Socio-economic Consequences of Border Porosity for Sierra Leone's National Security

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Supervisor: Dr. Sergio Catignani

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## **Abstract**

One of the major threats to state security has been border porosity. In an increasing globalized world, trans-border crimes are on the rise with significant consequences for the security of nation-states. These consequences have played out in different ways. Thus, the focus of this research is to critically examine the socio-economic consequences of border porosity, using Sierra Leone as a case study. This study adopts a qualitative research design. It draws upon mostly primary data obtained from individual semi-structured interviews with government officials, policy makers, border operatives, commuters and residents in border communities in Sierra Leone.

The research findings revealed that the porous nature of Sierra Leone borders has left the country susceptible to several security threats such as smuggling (essential commodities and arms), drug trafficking, illegal fishing, and poaching. The research concludes that these threats cause serious socio-economic consequences affecting economic security, health security, public order and the wellbeing of the state.

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# **1. Chapter One**

## **1.1 Introduction**

The securitization of borders is very germane to the security and sovereignty of every state. In this era of globalization, trans-border crimes have increased as large numbers of people, goods and services flow across borders (Akinyemi, 2013; Julins, 2002). As states come together through regional and sub-regional networks, and with a level of openness to allow for cooperation in political, socio-economic and cultural spheres, criminal networks also avail themselves of these opportunities to facilitate transnational criminal activities (Opanike & Aduloju, 2015). Today, there is hardly any region of the world that is spared of the phenomenon of trans-border crimes (Aduloju, 2015). As a result, border porosity remains a concern for almost every nation in the world. As Brunet-Jailly (2007, 351) pointed out: "...no border or borderland is unique." Though the level of porosity of borders also vary from region to region and state to state (Biger, 1995). Whereas borders in developed nations could be intense sites of securitization, many of the borders in developing nations, especially African countries, have been characterised by high levels of porosity. For instance, in West Africa alone, there is a total of 35 international boundaries characterised by high levels of porosity (Lampthey, 2013). Even though many African governments spend much of their yearly national budget on security (Nnoli, 2006), many of them also still lack the required resources to guard their stretch borders. Also, from 1990 on, the African Union developed protocols to address the challenge of border porosity in the continent. However, there has not been any major progress due to inadequate resources and a lack of commitment by member states (Okunade & Ogunnubi, 2019). These challenges have left many borderlands in Africa porous and susceptible to trans-border criminal activities.

Sierra Leone is one of the countries facing the challenge of border porosity. It is also bounded by countries in the Mano River Union (MRU) basin that share common porous borders (Fayemi, 2004). However, among the four countries (Guinea, Liberia, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone) in the MRU basin, Sierra Leone has the highest number of porous entry points and has recorded several reports of border incursions<sup>1</sup>. In the last three decades, the three most devastating incidences that

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<sup>1</sup> Information was accessed from a security document classified as sensitive (accessed, 18/04/19).

threatened Sierra Leone's national security came from across its borders. First, the civil war (1991-2002) started when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels easily crossed the borders from neighbouring Liberia and entered into the town of Bomaru in the eastern part of Sierra Leone (Bobson-Kamara et al, 2005). Second, there was a violation of Sierra Leone's airspace by an aircraft carrying 700 kilograms (1,540 pounds) of cocaine in 2008 (Massaquoi, 2008). Lastly, the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) broke out in the country in 2014 when infected individuals from Guinea crossed the borders to Sierra Leone (Wauquier, 2015). These incidences threatened Sierra Leone's national security and brought several other consequences upon the country. Sierra Leone was the most severely affected country in West Africa with a total of 17,318 EVD cases and a total of 2,536 deaths (WONG et al, 2016). Also, the war left 50,000 dead and 20,000 mutilated – while three quarters of the population displaced (Meredith 2006, 572). The violation of Sierra Leone's airspace by a cocaine carrying aircraft tainted the image of the country and many Sierra Leoneans were subjected to thorough searches whenever they visited other countries (Standard Times, 2008).

As Sierra Leone went through these situations, efforts have also been made along the way to address the challenge of border porosity. From 1997 to 2007, the country benefited from a Security Sector Reform (SSR) which was the most far reaching and deepest since its independence. During the SSR, efforts were made to restructure, strengthen and capacitate institutions responsible to manage and secure Sierra Leone's territorial integrity and sovereignty (Rashid, 2016; Gbla, 2012). Consequently, several strategic and operational actions were adopted. A Joint Maritime Committee (JMC) was established to strengthen institutional cooperation and collaboration on maritime security – and with support from international partners logistics were procured to support maritime operations. The military established thirteen Forward Patrol Bases (FPBs) and five Forward Operational Bases (FOBs) that, from time to time, conduct joint border patrols with the police along the land and maritime borders. Regarding the airspace, the Civil Aviation Act was passed in 2008 to provide the legal basis for the general supervision and regulation of the aviation sector. This resulted into the creation of the Sierra Leone Civil Aviation Authority (SLCAA), whose mandate is to adopt measures to protect the country's airspace. In addition, the Government of Sierra Leone, in collaboration with the MRU, established Joint Border Security and Confidence Building Units (JBSCBUs) under the MRU 15<sup>th</sup> Protocol in border districts to implement an Integrated Border Security Management System with neighbouring MRU countries (Awoko, 2019).

Despite these efforts, Sierra Leone still faces the challenge of border porosity. The country still has at least 800 porous border entry points (Kamara, 2020). Like other countries in Africa, Sierra Leone does not have the required resources to control its stretch borders. Also, unprofessional conducts by border operatives have rendered border entry points porous by allowing the crossings of illegal people and goods. This causes several socio-economic consequences for Sierra Leone which this dissertation seeks to examine critically. Border studies remain under-theorized. Thus, this research seeks to augment the ongoing theoretical discussion within border studies by elaborating upon the theoretical approach of border porosity and its consequences. Also, research on the consequences of border porosity in the MRU basin is almost non-existent. This research therefore seeks to fill that gap by providing basis for further research; and also informing future border management policy in Sierra Leone. The research question that was investigated is: What are the socio-economic consequences of border porosity for Sierra Leone's national security? The overall aim of this research is to critically examine the socio-economic consequences of border porosity for Sierra Leone's national security. As such, the research aim was achieved through the following research objectives:

1. To assess the porosity of Sierra Leone borders;
2. To evaluate Sierra Leone's border management and security;
3. To critically examine the socio-economic consequences associated with Sierra Leone's cross-border nefarious activities;
4. To provide policy recommendations regarding border porosity in Sierra Leone.

## **1.2 Methodology**

This dissertation adopts a qualitative research design. As Creswell (2014, 4) maintained: "A qualitative research aims at exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem." The research focusses on actions and processes of border security, local border actors and trans-border activities in Sierra Leone. Accordingly, a qualitative approach is considered most appropriate in this kind of research than a quantitative approach which is statistical intensive and apt for "examining the relationship among variables" (ibid). This makes the qualitative approach an ideal method to be adopted for this research as it seeks to examine the processes and actions around border security and cross-border activities in Sierra Leone.

### **1.2.1 Sampling**

Research participants are recruited using three purposive sampling methods. I started off with expert sampling to interview participants who have professional knowledge in areas such as border management/security and profile/status of border crossing points in Sierra Leone. As Alan Bryman (2012, 481) maintained purposive sampling is about recruiting participants with strategic importance to the research project. Subsequently, I used a snow balling strategy to also get responses from prominent individuals that were mentioned during earlier interviews. Later on, I adopted the maximum variation sampling to select a diverse range of participants including security operatives at border crossing points, residents in border communities and trans-border commuters in Kambia, Port Loko and Bombali districts in the Northern Region; Pujehun district in the Southern Region; Kailahun district in the Eastern Region; and Freetown in the Western Area Region. The rationale was to speak with different kinds of people in order to construct a robust, balanced, and wide-ranging view of the problem.

I was able to recruit participants in different ways. For experts and border operatives, I had worked with them in my capacity as security analyst in the Sierra Leone government. Thus, I was able to use that to contact potential research participants based on prior shared work experiences and on common professional networks that are relevant to my research project. However, cognisant of my positionality, I made sure that my position, even though rather junior, or the positions of my superiors were not used to subject anyone to any undue pressure in order to voluntarily participate in my research project. For commuters, drivers and residents in border communities, I approached them on one-to-one basis and gave their verbal voluntary consent to the terms of the research and participated.

### **1.2.2 Data Collection**

Data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews. Apart from being the most used in qualitative research (Bryman 2012, 469), I consider the flexibility of semi-structured interviews as necessary to be able to provide reliable, comparable qualitative data. I decided to choose a semi-structured interview technique over unstructured or standardised interviews in order to strike a fine balance between guarded discussions and an opportunity to probe further and hear in-depth explanations from participants on a range of issues.

Though I was able to explain verbally the nature, aims, and risks of the research project to the best of their understanding, yet all those who underwent an interview were also allowed to express their responses freely and I reiterated to them that they could decline to answer any specific questions and/or withdraw their participation in toto at any stage of the research process up to the writing up of my research findings. This was done to encourage normal interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee as Babbie (2007, 306) noted that qualitative interview is basically an interaction between the researcher and the respondent. The interview questions were based on key themes around objective one, two, and three. I interviewed 56 participants between the ages of 18 and 45.

### **1.2.3 Data Analysis**

Analysis of data was done thematically. The themes were developed based on the objectives of the research. As participants were drawn from different backgrounds and responded to various issues, a thematic analysis of the findings becomes necessary to critically examine the “pattern and linkages within the data” (Spencer et al 2014, 280). To guarantee the confidentiality and anonymity of research participants, personal identification was removed during the transcribing of data. I made it very clear that I intended to anonymise all interview data in my analysis and this work would be used to write up a research paper that could possibly become publicly available.

### **1.2.4 Ethical Considerations**

Before coming to study at the University of Exeter, I had already developed an interest in this area of research and I collected data for this project in Sierra Leone. However, there is no research ethics capacity in Sierra Leone that could have approved my research project or any associated paperwork, such as a research participant information sheet or a written consent form, which could have formed part of a regular research ethics approval application process. Indeed, according to the MARC (Mapping African Research Ethics Review Capacity) Project funded by the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership, which has set out to map research ethics committee capacity throughout Africa, there is neither basic nor second level research ethics capacity in Sierra Leone (Kruger, Ndebele & Horn 2014, 14). Also, as Tindana, Kass & Akweongo (2006) highlighted, the use of written consent documents is problematic in countries where there are non-literate populations [the current literacy rate of 15+ years old in

Sierra Leone is 43.21% (UNESCO, 2018)]. Nevertheless, several guidelines and reports on research ethics endorse the use of verbal consent for research in countries where cultural values and practices emphasize oral rather than written agreements and where formal research ethics processes have not been developed as in the case of Sierra Leone (National Bioethics Advisory Commission, 2005). Thus, I did take the necessary steps in order to uphold the key research ethics of informed consent, voluntary participation, and research(er) confidentiality as already explained above.

### **1.2.5 Limitations of the research**

This work has some limitations. Firstly, the purposive and snowball sampling techniques have been identified with shortcomings. It has been argued that the purposive technique limits the breadth and objectivity of the research as the researcher might be tempted to recruit only those he can reach and not on relevance. Also, recommending other participants based on snowballing could limit the objectivity. However, a careful consideration was given to all of this and with the diverse nature of participants, a robust, balanced and in-depth responses were gathered.

This research is structured as follow: The next chapter covers the review of relevant literature. Chapter three looks at Sierra Leone civil war and reconstruction phase, especially the SSR programme. Chapter four covers major findings and analysis. Chapter five presents the conclusion and key recommendations. The main argument of this research is that the porous nature of Sierra Leone's borders poses socio-economic consequences for Sierra Leone national security.

## **2. Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter critically examines the scholarship on the socio-economic consequences of border porosity, drawing mostly from border studies in Africa. The review therefore focuses on a broader perspective and not just Sierra Leone. This is to allow for possible comparison in the findings later on in chapter four. Starting with the definition of borders, this chapter covers the different arguments put forward regarding the porous nature of borders and the consequences thereof.

## **2.2 The borders**

There has been little agreement in academia on what borders really are. Traditionally, borders have been described as geographical demarcations with features such as fences, walls, rivers, or mountains (Gerstein et al 2018; Anderson et al 2003; Newman 2003). This view perceives borders as the physical manifestations that separate states, regions, and thus jurisdictions. Accordingly, it is all of the particularities of geography that constitute the borders and not just formal entry points or official routes. Thus, borders in this sense are regarded as static demarcating features (Sendhardt 2013, 25). Contrary to this traditional view, there is a social constructive view which points at social processes and change factors (Newman 2006; Van Houtum et al. 2005; Paasi 2001). This new perspective sees borders not as territorial lines but social processes exercised to control the movement of people and goods across nations. Accordingly, borders “are not merely physical, empirical lines or zones that can be frozen on maps and atlases as naturalized entities” but multifaceted social constructs (Paasi 2001, 22). This view moves beyond the traditional demarcations to focus on the practices and discourses in which boundaries are produced and reproduced (Paasi 2005, 18). It ignores the claim that borders are static features because they are continuously remade on the basis of concrete political, cultural, and economic practices (Stetter, 2008). Notwithstanding these differences, both views agreed that borders represent a significant characteristic of the state and are crucial to every nation’s sovereignty.

While both traditional and social constructivist views have some valid explanations, they cannot also go without controversy. The traditional view of borders being static geographical features has been naïve to situations of state(s) secession. For instance, the fall of the Soviet Union and subsequent incidences that led to the emergence of new states brought about some alterations of existing geographical demarcations and caused a remapping of Europe. Also, the fundamental argument of social constructivists is confusing in that the recurring theme is the process of bordering which does not take into account territorial lines which are permeable. However, for the purpose of this dissertation, the two views will be explored; and this research looks at borders as both physical features and social processes exercised to control the flow of people and goods.

## **2.3 Border Porosity**

Scholars have put forward different arguments regarding the porous nature of borders, pointing at a range of factors that are internal and external to the state which I have decided to examine using the three levels of analysis (global, state and the individual). On the global level, Brunet-Jailly (2007, 351) has argued that: “Borders are porous due to such critical factors as market forces, flows of trade, and the movements of people.” A similar argument was earlier shared in Ohmae’s “borderless world” when he argued that there is increasing permeability of borders as ideas, goods, people and capital move across borders more easily in a globalised world dominated by marketplaces (Ohmae, 1994). At the state level, it has been argued that inadequacy of established structures in terms of agencies, systems, policies and logistics relating to border security management has caused many borders to remain porous (Akinyemi 2019; Lamptey 2013). Also, the lack of cooperation between/among states to implement holistic border management strategies at sub-regional and regional levels leaves many borders permeable (Okunade & Ogunnubi 2019; Lamptey 2013). At the individual level, borders are porous because of the unprofessional conducts of border officials who compromise their work and avoid due processes for personal gains, by allowing the crossings of illegal goods and people (Opanike & Aduloju 2015; Agbo & Lazare 2013)

While these views can be valid explanations for the porous nature of borders in their individual respect; in Africa, conceptual frameworks in border studies draw on all three levels to explain the porous nature of borders. A study conducted in West Africa revealed that citizens of the ECOWAS are sacrificed on the altar of the corruption organized and maintained by border officials (Agbo & Lazare, 2013). In another study, it is revealed that at some borders, “appropriate infrastructure such as detection equipment and scanners are not always present...and the customs administration in most countries of the region is also not usually equipped with national databases of offenders and the volumes of illicit commodity that they move across boundaries” (Lamptey, 2013). Moreover, the global penetration and economic policies such as the ECOWAS protocols on free trade and movement have increased the flow of goods and people across borders, sometimes through unofficial routes (Akinyemi, 2019). Thus, the scholarship on the porous nature of African borders does not point at a single factor but draws from all three levels of analysis.

#### **2.4 Socio-Economic Consequences**

Scholars have argued that the nature of any border regime has significant socio-economic consequences for the state. However, their views have been divergent; and for the purpose of analysis I categorise these views into two analytical dimensions: optimist and pessimist views respectively. On the economic consequence, optimist views claim that porosity and openness of borders will open up a window that eases the commerce that flow across international boundaries which serves to promote border markets and benefit border communities which are quite reliant on such trade (Engel & Rogers 1996; Loesch 1954). This informal cross-border trade, Gerstein et al (2018, 5) claimed, helps reduce poverty and improve food security. The militarization and tightened of border security, they argued, have a cost on the livelihood of cross-border communities and employment prospects especially for people involved in informal cross-border commerce. Reports on North African nations postulated that young men who were unable to earn incomes from smuggling because of border closures ended up being migrants escaping to Europe to seek better opportunities (ibid). On the social consequence, optimist views remark that when people are able to move freely across borders, often they help to promote cultural ties and strong bonds between nations (Brunet-Jailly 2007, 355). However, despite these claims, the optimist views have been naïve and failed to look at the bigger picture. Economic gains from informal cross-border trade, especially through smuggling activities, come at the expense of the state. The revenues generated from informal cross-border business have been used to perpetrate other criminal activities and social problems (Okumu, 2000), including illicit trade of all kind such as drugs, currency, and arms (Julins, 2002), which are inimical to the security of the state.

The pessimist views, on the other hand, argued that the porous nature of borders has negative socio-economic consequences for the state. On the economic consequence, tax evasion caused mainly by smuggling activities has been identified as a major threat to revenue generation in African nations (Hahonou 2016; Opanike & Aduloju 2015). West African borders, for instance, have become a safe haven for smuggling and trafficking activities (Akinyemi 2019; Adepoju, 2015). In Ghana, border guards are co-opted into local smuggling networks (Nugent, 1999). Likewise, corruption by border officials deprives the state of the much-needed revenue to support development projects and negatively affecting citizens' access to basic public services (Coffey 2016; Chene & Zinnbaur 2010). Agbo and Lazare (2013) maintained that on the West African borders, in spite of set procedures, the citizens of the ECOWAS are sacrificed on the altar of the corruption organized and maintained by immigration authorities. This view was also reinforced in 2015 by Opanike and Aduloju when they conclude that “the security forces [at

border posts] have rather turned the job to their own business, encouraging the crossing of smugglers of all sorts of commodities from one country to another with just a tip of tokens.” Bribing of this nature allows users to escape the taxation of goods or bureaucratic procedures imposed by state agents. These activities undermine revenue collection and thus financial stability which has negative consequence on the economic wellbeing of the state.

Apart from revenue loss, the rise in trans-border crimes has been identified as another consequence of border porosity in Africa (Okunade & Ogunnubi 2019; Akinyemi 2019). The ease of passage of militants and their weapons has caused the spread of terrorist networks and contributed to the insecurity of the African region (Akinyemi 2019; Opanike & Aduloiu, 2015). From Mali to the Horn of Africa, the spread of extremist ideologies has made long-term stability a challenge for most of the countries in the region (Knoope & Chauzal, 2016). A study conducted by Hahonou (2016) revealed that funds to terrorist organisations such as Islamic State in West Africa partly come from trans-border trade they control between Nigeria and Niger. Also, a report by the Department for International Development (2005, 7) maintained that casualties from international terrorism were nearly 28,000 in Africa and Asia, compared with 5,000 in North America and Western Europe. According to the report, Africa and Asia recorded the highest number of casualties partly because of the level of porosity of their borders as compared to North America and Western Europe.

Border permeability has also opened the way for criminal networks to evolve and infiltrate most African states. Drug traffickers increasingly use Africa as transit point. According to World Drug Report 2020, “in 2017, the amount of heroin seized in Africa tripled compared with 2013 and increased by 31 percent compared with 2016 - a higher growth rate than the global average - mainly as a result of heroin trafficking from South-West Asia to or through East Africa” (UNODC, 2020). This has serious consequence for African states and their citizens who suffer from disorders due to drug use (ibid). Furthermore, porosity and inefficient security checks at most borders have also caused the spread of communicable diseases between and/or among states in Africa. The porosity of the national borders in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone caused serious health problems during the Ebola crisis from 2014 to 2016 (Gerstein et al 2018, 6). Inadequate border controls complicated efforts to halt the spread of the virus (ibid).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The review of relevant literatures has revealed that there are major consequences of border porosity on state security. However, opinions are divided on what the consequences will be. Thus, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing discussions by critically examine the socio-economic consequences of border porosity, using Sierra Leone as a case study. The next chapter looks at the Sierra Leone civil war and post-war SSR programme with a particular interest in the porous nature of Sierra Leone borders and the consequences.

# **3. Chapter Three: Sierra Leone Civil War and Reconstruction**

## **3.1 Introduction**

This Chapter looks at Sierra Leone civil war and the reconstruction phase; especially the SSR process. The chapter covers the role that the porous nature of Sierra Leone borders played in the conflict and the consequences thereof. Also, it demonstrates that the SSR programme targeted border security but did not adequately address the issue of border porosity.

## **3.2 Sierra Leone Civil War**

The civil war started on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1991, when the RUF rebels entered into Sierra Leone through the Liberian border and launched their first attack in the town of Bomaru in the eastern part of Sierra Leone (Bobson-Kamara et al, 2005). The RUF declared that their aim was to remove the All People's Congress party which had been in power since 1968 (Kargbo, 2012), and replace it with 'a just, democratic, and egalitarian regime' (Zubairu 2012, 95). The RUF's leadership was largely composed of students and revolutionaries from Sierra Leone's capital

Freetown (Peters 2006; Abdullah 2004). However, the RUF also drew great inspiration and support from former President Colonel Gaddafi of Libya and former President Taylor of Liberia (Rashid, 2016). Taylor supported the RUF in revenge of the act of Sierra Leone's President Joseph Momoh who allowed Sierra Leone's airport to be used by ECOMOG as take-off point to bomb his National Patriotic Front of Liberia fighters at a crucial point during the Liberian civil war (Zack-Williams, 2012). Also, and most importantly, Taylor was profiting from Sierra Leone diamonds that were being smuggled by the RUF through porous borders into Liberia (Meredith, 2006; Gberie 2003, 2005). Likewise, Gaddafi supported the revolutionary cause of the RUF and provided the platform for them to conduct military training in Benghazi in 1987 (Rashid, 2016).

At the inception of the war, the borders of Sierra Leone were mostly porous. The country lacked the required logistics and personnel to undertake what Peter Andreas called "enhanced policing" of its territories through border control (Andreas, 2000). As a result, the manner in which Sierra Leone guarded its borders was based on what I called selective control. That is, controlling those border entry points that were deemed official and crucial; while the overwhelming smaller crossing points were largely unmanned. These porous crossing points were exploited by the RUF as facilitation routes for 'the flow of weapons, the movement of combatants, and the exploitation of resources' (Silberfein & Conteh 2006, 343). The bulk of the RUF fighters came from neighbouring states such as Liberia, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, and they took advantage of common porous borders to cross freely into Sierra Leone (Fayemi, 2004). Also, the initial RUF fighting equipment such as 'trucks, 4x4 vehicles, AK-47s, and rocket-propelled grenades' were brought into Sierra Leone from Liberia (Rashid 2016, 193). This free movement of weapons and combatants contributed to the prolong nature of the war and led to a decade of violence that devastated the country.

The war impacted greatly on Sierra Leone's national security. The nation experienced a wave of vengeance and mayhem that swept across the country. A summary of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report revealed that there were incidences of indiscriminate amputations, abductions of women and children, unjustified killings and wanton destruction of villages and towns (Bobson-Kamara et al, 2005). Also, the security forces, economic activities, and governance structures were seriously affected and the country was reduced to a failed state (Rashid, 2016). The government of Sierra Leone had to rely on international aid to pursue the war. In 1997, Nigerian-led ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) entered the

country (Den Heyer 2012; Weiss 2008). Subsequently, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone, Britain and other international partners joined efforts to end the war and bring lasting peace to Sierra Leone (Gbla 2012; Meredith 2006). By July 1999, the Lomé Peace Accord was signed by the warring factors; and in 2002, the President of Sierra Leone officially declared an end to the civil war (Bobson-Kamara et al, 2005)

### **3.3 Reconstruction - Security Sector Reform**

Like in most post-conflict states, Sierra Leone benefited from unprecedented post-war reconstruction package. The reconstruction package was wide-ranging covering different sectors.<sup>2</sup> However, here, the focus will be on the SSR and especially the extent to which it addresses the issue of border porosity in Sierra Leone.

After the 1996 national elections, a need existed to reform the security sector which was seriously affected by the war and mistrusted by the new government. From 1997 to 2002, programmes for the transformation of the police, the military, and the judiciary were developed; and between 2002 and 2005 the SSR progressed in its implementation linking security strategy and development objectives (Albrecht & Jackson, 2009). The UK was the first to provide support and work in tandem with the new government to start the SSR, targeting the police (Gbla, 2006). Subsequently, the SSR took a multi-agency approach with the involvement of other international actors. This also broadened its scope to include other institutions such as the military, judiciary, prisons, immigration, parliament and civil society (Gbla, 2012). Though the SSR focused on a wide range of security related projects and targeted several security related bodies, my focus will be those activities and institutions that are concerned with border security.

Traditionally, the military, police, immigration and customs are the most dominant border operatives in Sierra Leone. Thus, they became considerably the targeted bodies in terms of reforms in relation to border security. Starting with the police, a retired British officer, Keith Biddle, spearheaded reforms in the form of restructuring and rebuilding of the police force from 1999 to 2003 (Rashid, 2016). Biddle oversaw the rebuilding of police stations and barracks that

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<sup>2</sup> (See, for example, Gberie 2000; Adibe 2003; Abdullah 2004; Fithen and Richards 2005; Richards 2006; Hoffman 2007; Schumer 2008)

were burnt down, and this included those in border communities to restore security in those areas. Recruitment and trainings were done to strengthen the force and promote professionalism which is key in policing the borders. Also, the Special Security Division of the police was retrained and renamed the Operational Support Division (OSD). The OSD being the gun carrying unit of the police are made to team up with the military to conduct joint patrols along selected borders (ibid). A community policing was adopted through Local Police Partnership Boards so that locals can report crimes to the police including cross border crimes (Friedman, 2011; Thompson, 2007).

The military which stayed as three independent entities (Sierra Leone Army, Sierra Leone Air Force, and Sierra Leone Navy) before the war, was merged under a single command structure with a new name Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (Jane, 2010). Several trainings and retraining were conducted for all three wings to improve their capabilities and professionalism. One of the trainings code-named ‘Operation Reassurance’ produced units that were posted to vulnerable areas, especially border points (Rashid, 2016). The military also benefited from logistical aid offered by international partners in support of border security. For instance, the Maritime wing received three 32-foot cutters from the United States and 10 fast attack craft and a patrol boat from China, respectively, bringing its fleet up to 14 operational patrol craft from zero (Skora, 2010).

Moreover, the Immigration Department (ID) used to be under the Sierra Leone Police. With reforms made, in 2002, immigration became a civil service function under the Ministry of Internal Affairs (GoSL, 2004). Uniformed body guards were recruited by the ID and posted to assist with border entry checks, under the supervision of Immigration Assistant Officers. Likewise, the Customs Office (CO) was subsumed under a newly established institution called National Revenue Authority (NRA). However, the CO still serves at the borders and plays the role of controlling the import and export of goods and raising custom dues for the government.

In addition, a new institution called Office of National Security (ONS) was established in 2002 to serve as the main coordinating outfit within the security sector (NaSCIA, 2002: 10). The Creation of the ONS also comes with the establishment of Provincial, District and Chiefdom Security Committees (PROSECs, DISECs and CHISECs) as sub-committees within the ONS to address security threats including cross-border crimes (ibid). The PROSECs were established in all four provinces and the DISECs in all twelve districts, including the Western Area rural and

capital. However, due to resource constraints, the CHISECs were established in selective chiefdoms. Out of the 149 chiefdoms, only those that share borders with Guinea and Liberia were prioritized with the aim of strengthening border security. Though, out of the 45 chiefdoms that share borders with neighbouring countries, the CHISECs were only established in 15 chiefdoms. This means that a remainder of 30 border chiefdoms were left without adequate security arrangement to deal with cross border threats.<sup>3</sup>

The SSR was highly focused in the areas of institutional arrangements, professional trainings and logistical supports in a bid to step up border security. Despite these efforts, the general security at the borders still remain practically low. A national border assessment conducted by the Office of National Security in 2004 concludes that Sierra Leone's land borders remain porous (quoted in NRA Report 2006, 1). Though important and demanding reforms have been undertaken, border officials and the logistics provided them were inadequate (ibid, 109). As a result, they can only cover few border points. Also, only 15 out of 45 border chiefdoms benefited from the CHISEC arrangements. This shows that there are more border chiefdoms that are left unattended.

Furthermore, despite the professional trainings received by border operatives, there are still integrity issues. The NRA Report (2006) observed that security personnel deployed at border posts continue to aid and abet smugglers in the various border communities. Such actions render those border points porous and susceptible. Thus, even though the SSR attempted to beef up border security, it is not adequate enough, leaving most areas permeable. The next chapter covers the presentation and analysis of the major findings of this research.

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<sup>3</sup> Information on the deployment and operations of security committees were accessed from a security document classified as sensitive (accessed, 18/07/20).

## **4. Chapter Four: Research Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter covers the presentation and discussion of major findings of the research. The findings come from primary data collection through semi-structured interviews. The findings are presented and examined based on the objectives of the research.

### **4.2 Porosity of Sierra Leone borders**

Sierra Leone has a vast land border of about 2,188 Kilometres (km) bounded with Guinea on the North-East and Liberia on the South-East. The coastal boundary with the Atlantic Ocean is about 625 Nautical miles (nm) from the North to the South-West. The air space has a vertical distance (height) of over 12,000ft and a lateral distance (width) of over 85nm. Securing these borders remains a challenge. Responses from three policy makers who work in the aviation, maritime and customs sectors are that:

*“The land, air and sea border crossing points are categorized into Classes A, B and C. Out of the land and maritime border crossing points, about 20% are either Class A (fully manned) or Class B (partially manned), while the remaining (about 80%) are Class C (unmanned). For the airspace, Sierra Leone does not have the capacity to monitor her Class A airspace [with a vertical distance (height) of over 12000ft and a lateral distance (width) of over 85nm] and her Class B airspace (with a vertical distance of 3000ft-*

*12000ft and a lateral distance of 25nm- 84nm). The country therefore operates on Class C airspace (with a vertical distance of 3000ft and a lateral distance of 25 nm).”*

Inadequate capacity in terms of human and material resources is the cause for the country’s inability to fully secure its borders, they maintained. While respondents were only able to provide percentages on the numbers of manned and unmanned borders, in a newspaper interview, the Director for Provincial and Border Security in the Government of Sierra Leone stated that: “The country has at least eight hundred (800) unsecured porous entry points” (Kamara, 2020). Similarly, the reason the Director gave for this number of porous borders is that there is inadequate security presence (personnel and logistics) to man those border areas. In addition, the unprofessionalism of border officials was also mentioned by most respondents as a reason for the porous nature of the borders. This unprofessional conduct is explained by endemic corrupt practices that eventually meet the interests of both border officials and users. Responses from a border management official are that:

*“Corruption is embedded in the social norms of users of public service here [in Sierra Leone]. Many people who cross the borders, especially those who do not want to go through the normal checks, will use money or some other gifts to facilitate their crossings; and some border officials are also cheerful receivers.”*

A driver, on the other hand, maintained that “...border operatives are actually the ones making such demands and we [drivers] are left with no option but to comply so that we could not be delayed at the borders while we have passengers with perishable goods.” However, a resident in a border community observed that: “Here [border posts] corruption meets the interest of both the border operatives and users. It is almost a new normal for users to give bribes to border operatives. In return, border operatives turn a blind eye to the type of imported/exported goods and the identity of persons that pass the border.” On one instance, a border operative admitted that the conditions of service are leading some border officials to compromise their work. What also came out is that there are no representatives from the Anti-Corruption Commission at many border posts which is a critical oversight in the management of the borders. Despite the different views, what is certain is that some form of corruption takes place and those practices make opportunities for the illegal crossings of all sort of people and goods thus rendering those border entry points porous. Thus, as the literature review suggests, inadequate infrastructure to man the borders (Lamprey, 2013), and compromises of border officials for personal gains (Opanike &

Aduloju 2015; Agbo & Lazare 2013), are the two main reasons identified for the porous nature of Sierra Leone borders.

### **4.3 Sierra Leone border management and security**

On border management, a senior policy maker responded that: “There is no independent border management framework in Sierra Leone. Rather, managing the security of the borders falls under the general duties of pertinent institutions such as the military, police, immigration, customs, and ONS.” These institutions carry the tasks of regulating the flow of people, goods and services across the borders – and this is done at both strategic and operation levels as he further described:

*“At the top, heads of institutions work both independently and in security committees to consider matters of the borders. While at the bottom, institutional representatives serve as border operatives. These operatives work in tandem with their institutional arrangements and report through their institutional line of command. Though at some point they do share information and collectively address issues.”*

In the area of providing security to the borders, many respondents observed that overtime the government has done a lot to improve on border security. However, there are still gaps in terms of human and material resources. An official of the Sierra Leone Airport Authority maintained that: “The security at the airport is relatively stable with the presence of both national security forces and a British company Westminster Aviation Security Services.” However, he also mentioned that the country can only operate on “Class C” airspace because of capacity challenges. A similar view was shared by senior personnel of the Sierra Leone Civil Aviation Authority who indicated that “aircrafts entering Sierra Leone’s airspace are expected to make initial contact with air traffic controllers and state the purpose of their entry. However, there is no mechanism to detect an aircraft that fails to make such contact within the airspace.” Also, a senior military officer observed that: “The Air Wing of the military lacks adequate air defense capability to detect, deter and interdict airspace violations.” The inability of the country to monitor her Class ‘A’ and Class ‘B’ airspace and also the capacity challenges to fully monitor her Class ‘C’ airspace that is currently operational constitute a threat to state security. For instance, in 2008 an aircraft carrying 700 kilograms (1,540 pounds) of cocaine violated the

country's airspace and made unauthorised landing at the Freetown International Airport (Massaquoi, 2008).

For maritime security, a senior security personnel stated that: "The country currently has two off-shore RIB sea-going assets, Chinese riverine patrol boat, ten inshore open skiffs and a US Gifted Cutter to support costal operations." However, he also highlighted that these equipment are not enough and that maritime operatives still do not have the required logistics including surveillance equipment that can effectively monitor the territorial waters of Sierra Leone. Also, there is paucity of trained personnel to undertake the breadth of maritime operations. A senior maritime operative indicated that: "We have a challenge of adequate human resource for coastal deployment and maritime patrols." As a result of this, he advanced, "there have been incidences of unknown vessels intermittently appearing and disappearing off the coasts - and while the Maritime Wing has the ability to spot the vessels, it however, lacks the capacity in some situations to reach them." So, even though maritime patrols are being done to secure the territorial waters, capacity challenges affect maritime operations in its effectiveness and coverage; thereby leaving some areas uncontrolled. With this, the possibility exists for rogue elements such as pirates and illegal fishermen to commit nefarious activities in the Sierra Leonean waters, especially the Economic Exclusive Zone, which could impact on the security of the country and its people.

On land borders, a senior security official indicated that "there are Forward Patrol Bases (FPB) and Forward Operational Bases (FOBs) established for patrolling and manning border areas." These FPBs and FOBs consist of military and police border operatives who conduct joint deployments and operations to secure land and maritime border areas. While most respondents acknowledge the establishment of these FPBs and FOBs, some also highlighted persistent problems of inadequate logistics and poor accommodation facilities at these bases thereby exposing personnel to adverse weather conditions and hampering normal border patrol programmes. This limits their reach in terms of the numbers of border points to be covered and the frequency of undertaking such patrols. In addition, what also came out is that personnel deployment is grossly inadequate. Thus, deployment is based on the strategic nature of border crossing points in terms of security and revenue collection considerations.

In the area of interstate collaboration, a senior security official responded that the MRU has in place Joint Border Security and Confidence Building Units (JBSCBUs) that implement an

Integrated Border Security Management System for member states. However, border operatives have mixed reactions with regard the effectiveness of the JBSCBUs. While some believe they help promote information sharing and uniformity in response among the four members of the MRU; others maintain that it is yet to minimise cross-border nefarious activities among the four states. Some of these activities, they claimed, are caused by security forces who should be custodians of the JBSCBUs. According to border operatives, between January 2016 and April 2017, there were twelve (12) reports of Guinean Armed Forces (GAF) incursions into Sierra Leone borders. Hence, the JBSCBU initiative is yet to meet the challenge of effective border management in the MRU basin. In sum, responses suggest that the security coverage is still inadequate and this renders many border points porous and susceptible with significant socio-economic consequences which are discussed below.

#### **4.4 Socio-economic consequences**

**Economic:** Many respondents indicate that there are serious implications regarding the significant loss in revenue due to illegal cross border activities – especially smuggling, illegal fishing and poaching. According to a senior policy maker in the government:

*“There have been incidents of both technical (the manipulation of import/export information to avoid the payment of duties) and physical (the failure of importers/exporters to report the physical goods to enhance duty assessment) smuggling. Most of the goods that are smuggled out include essential food products, minerals, cannabis sativa and medical product; while those smuggled in include short guns and cartridges, counterfeit products, cattle, motor bikes, cigarettes, and clothing.”*

Technical smuggling happens at manned and partially manned border points where border operatives collaborate with smugglers to either devalue or allow free passage of goods with just a tip of token just as Opanike and Aduloju (2015) and Agbo and Lazare (2013) highlighted in the literature. Mentioning instances of technical smuggling, senior customs officer responded as follow:

*“A Roll Royce car was shipped into the country through the Queen Elizabeth II Quay and cleared for Le 12, 000, 000 (£988.07) but when intercepted the valuation cost of the vehicle as per details recorded in the bill of loading turned out to be Le 333, 000, 000*

*(£27,418.72). Also, security services intercepted five containers of used clothing that had been valued at Le 284, 888, 000 (£23,457.25). However, the revaluation revealed that the containers were worth Le 467,882, 398 (£38,524.73) amounting to a difference of Le 119, 484, 452 (£9,838.17).”*

Physical smuggling happens mostly at unmanned border areas where smugglers make their way in and out of the country using small boats, motorbikes, or walk on foot. According to residents in border communities, smuggling through unmanned border areas is higher during the dry season than the rainy season because of harsh weather condition which is risky considering the means that smugglers use to cross the borders. This has resulted in significant revenue loss through tax evasion. Though respondents could not give the exact amount of revenue loss, a senior border operative responded as follow:

*“We cannot actually determine the amount of revenue loss, especially from goods that pass through unmanned border areas. But from past experience, customs value of goods intercepted at smuggling points run into billions of Leones. So, you can imagine the many that could have already passed the borders freely...and this revenue shortages affect funding for development programmes and essential service delivery in the country.”*

However, IMF estimated that smuggling accounts for about 30 percent of customs revenue in Sierra Leone (quoted in NRA Report, 2006). Also, the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) Report (2012, 7) assessed that Sierra Leone loses about \$29,000,000 annually to illegal fishing mainly by foreign vessels. Apart from revenue loss, the smuggling of essential food products out of the country is causing food shortages which also leads to increase in prices of essential food products. This also has huge consequence on the sustenance of the people and the government which has to spend huge sums of money to subsidise for the importation of food stuffs as senior government official indicated:

*“Smuggling does not only deprive government of the much-needed revenue, but also forces government to use its reserve to either subsidise or independently import essential commodities such as the staple food rice that is produced here but being smuggled into neighbouring countries. Government is doing this to discourage increase in prices of food stuffs due to food shortages.”*

Systematic revenue loss has serious impact on economic security. Even though a donor driven country, the government of Sierra Leone relies heavily on internal revenue generation to run the country. Thus, smuggling in all guises undermines financial mobilization efforts. Where revenue generation is undermined, essential services to allow for the smooth running of the state will be affected and thus threatens the wellbeing and security of the people and the state.

**Social:** Smuggling also causes social threats to the state. A major concern raised by many respondents including government officials is the threat to health security. An official of the Sierra Leone Standards Bureau stated that: “Some of the goods that are smuggled into the country are fake/contaminated/expired medical products and foodstuffs.” This concern is also shared by residents in border communities who maintained that some people engage in smuggling because the products they carry are either counterfeit or contraband. A senior police officer described an operation they undertook to address the menace of unsafe medical and food products in the country as follow:

*“At one point, we conducted an operation and discovered large quantities of expired food stuffs on shelves at supermarkets, warehouses and stores in Freetown. Also, in another operation, 6 forty-feet containers of frozen chicken; 1 twenty-feet container of frozen sacrificial lamb; 8,682 cartoons cheese; 2,650 cartoons of SIR Cigarettes were discovered and later dumped at the Granville Park and Kingtom landfills because they were unfit and/or expired.”*

The smuggling, sale and consumption of expired foodstuffs and medical products in the country threaten the health of the citizens and could lead to a point of national health security crisis as these goods continue to come in and are sold everywhere in the country. This would have potential impact on human security, especially when the country does not have adequate health facilities as the EVD situation clearly exposed.

Another threat has been the trafficking of prohibited and high-risk drugs such as cocaine, tramadol, heroin and hashish in the country. According to personnel of the Transnational Organised Crime Unit: “These drugs are not only trafficked through Sierra Leone but they are also marketed and consumed in the country.” Respondents identified Nigerians, Gambians, Americans, Lebanese, Jamaicans and Sierra Leoneans as part of the syndicate. For cocaine and heroin, traffickers use flights coming to Sierra Leone to bring in the substance. However, cocaine

is also smuggled into the country from Liberia. While tramadol and hashish are mostly smuggled in from Guinea and Liberia. A senior security officer remarked that the circulation and intake of these drugs, especially by the youth, often result into drug resistance, drug abuse, severe health implications and social disorder. There have been serious cases of public order and social issues as these youth form themselves into cliques and gangs in the country, he maintained.

Respondents also mentioned the smuggling of small and light weapons into the country. While residents in border communities maintained that these weapons are being smuggled by hunters and cattle herders, security personnel indicated that they are being smuggled to be used for poaching, banditry and other organised crimes. Security personnel also linked the rise in armed robbery nationwide to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Increase in armed robbery poses serious threat to the security of peaceful citizens and the state. Also, with the challenge posed by terrorist organisations in West Africa, the ease of passage of weapons remain a serious threat to state security; especially when one of the countries in the MRU basin, Ivory Coast, has suffered from terrorist attacks. In conclusion, though consequences can be good, bad, or neutral; the findings of this research reveal that border porosity poses negative consequences for Sierra Leone's national security and this sits well with the pessimist views in the literature review. The next chapter presents the conclusion and key policy recommendations.

## **5. Chapter Five**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

The Government of Sierra Leone has over the years showed willingness and commitment to improve on the operations of the security sector. However, such willingness and commitment have not been adequate, leaving the sector still constrained in managing the country's borders. The deployment pattern of security forces and other relevant institutions of government along the borders suggests that they are grossly inadequate and poorly equipped to patrol and control the stretched borders. Also, the deplorable state of existing facilities is affecting the morale and productivity of security personnel stationed at border areas. As a result, the country is susceptible to organise criminal groups and other rogue elements who exploit this structural state weakness to engage in criminal activities and/or perpetrate violence.

This causes several socio-economic consequences that threaten the security of the state. The unavailability of requisite infrastructure and logistics to patrol the land and maritime borders has opened up the country to physical smuggling of mainly counterfeit and contraband products that pose great risk to the health security of the nation. Also, the deep-rooted corrupt attitude and negligence of border operatives who focused on receiving bribes without making proper checks on individuals and goods has not only encouraged technical smuggling but also accounts for leakages that are depriving the state of its much-needed revenue and thus undermines economic security. In addition, the protection of Sierra Leone's airspace faces significant challenges in respect of the lack of requisite capacity to monitor, detect, deter and interdict any airspace violation beyond the visible air horizon. This manifests a major vulnerability that threatens state security. The border areas offer Sierra Leone's major interfaces with the outside world. If the borders are porous, then the atmosphere is made favourable for criminal networks, including terrorist organizations, to undermine the security of the state.

## **5.2 Policy Recommendations**

- i. Capacity building:** It is important that the government prioritizes the training and deployment of more personnel to augment border operations, especially for the many land and maritime unmanned borders. This will help to address the challenge of physical smuggling and illegal fishing. Also, deployment should include personnel from the Anti-Corruption Commission to address corrupt practices and end technical smuggling. There is also need to provide fixed and rotary assets (troop lift, aerial interdiction) to provide tactical air support to protect the air space.

- ii. **Community involvement:** Considering the numerous unmanned border areas, and the challenges the government face to provide security presence in all these areas, it is worthy to improve community involvement by roping in local stakeholders in border communities. Community members are familiar with the routes more than the attached security personnel. One of the legacies of the SSR is the creation of Local Police Partnership Boards and CHISECs. However, many border communities do not have these arrangements. Thus, the security sector could consider mobilizing locals into organised bodies to identify and report cases of cross border smuggling activities to nearby police stations or chieftom security committees and/or take action against perpetrators through local chieftaincy courts. This will send a message that people are being watched over and will help reduce criminal activities.
  
- iii. **Improve interstate cooperation:** As a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, the security of Sierra Leone borders will depend on how well its neighbours secure theirs. Thus, a need exists to improve on the JCBUs initiative in the MRU basin and for a proper alignment of approaches among the four member states. This will minimise contradictions in approaches and scale up border security and management in the MRU basin.

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