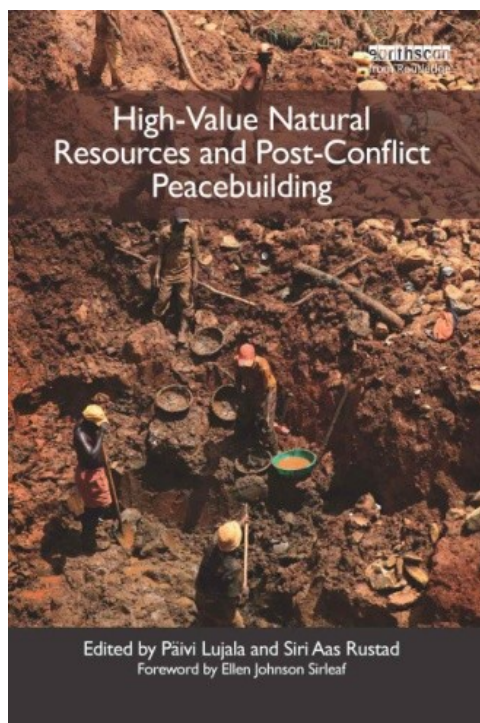


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**The Diamond Area Community Development Fund:
Micropolitics and community-led development in post-war Sierra Leone**

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The Diamond Area Community Development Fund: Micropolitics and community-led development in post-war Sierra Leone

Roy Maconachie

The Diamond Area Community Development Fund (DACDF), an initiative of the central government in Sierra Leone, was designed to strengthen citizen participation in decision making about natural resource management.¹ Like other community-based natural resource management initiatives in Africa,² the DACDF embraces community-led decision making as a means of ensuring that more benefits accrue to impoverished and vulnerable communities than has historically been the case.³ Among the major goals of the DACDF are to redress unequal power relationships within the diamond industry and to make local decision making about diamond resources more equitable. But the DACDF has largely failed to address many of the underlying power issues that shape decision making at the local level. The endurance of prewar patrimonial relationships subverts fair access to, and control of, the nation's diamond resources and threatens prospects for peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Although the Sierra Leone Ministry of Mineral Resources has developed a new set of procedures and guidelines to address the shortcomings of the DACDF, it remains unclear whether these guidelines will address the fundamental issue: namely, how community members participate in decision making about natural resources.

This chapter argues that there is a pressing need to view community participation in natural resource management within the broader political, cultural, and historical contexts in which it occurs, rather than to treat it as occurring

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¹ The fieldwork on which this chapter is based was undertaken in two communities in Kono District—Koidu and Kayima—between September and December 2008.

² Examples include CAMPFIRE, in Zimbabwe (see Hulme and Murphree 2001), and Gestion des Terroirs, in Mali (see Batterbury 1998).

³ In addition, because the DACDF returns a percentage of mining revenue to the producing chiefdoms, it has been widely heralded as providing considerable incentive for both miners and diamond-rich chiefdoms to report revenues and to engage in legal diamond mining, thereby enhancing the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) for rough diamonds. See Maconachie (2009) for further discussion of the relationship between the KPCS and the DACDF.

within a romanticized notion of democratic space that is isolated from and unaffected by the real world. The chapter is divided into four sections: (1) a description of the background against which the DACDF came into being; (2) an exploration of the problems and prospects associated with the DACDF; (3) a list of lessons learned; and (4) brief concluding remarks.

BACKGROUND

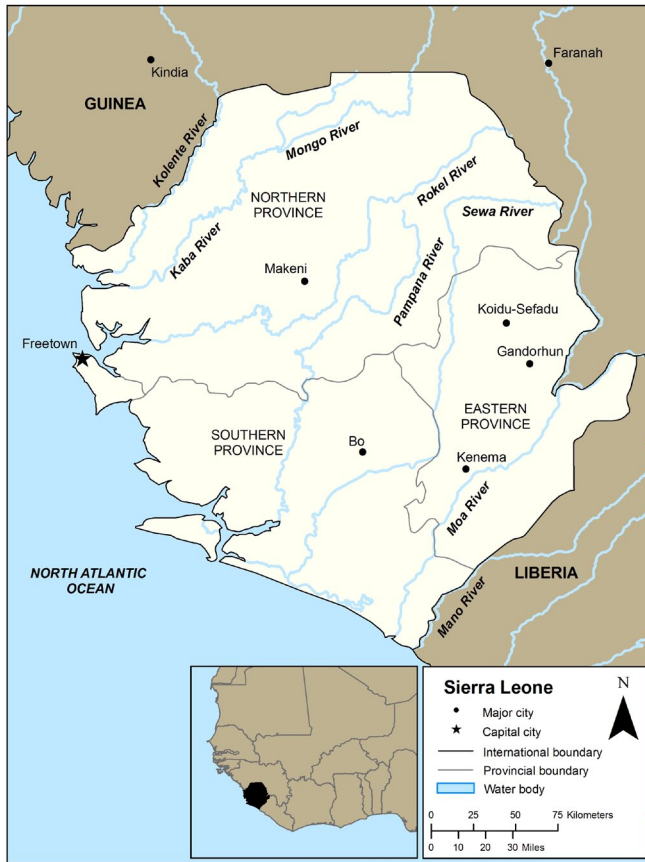
Sierra Leone is a constitutional republic with an elected president who serves as head of state and head of the central government. The country is divided into thirteen districts (twelve districts plus the Western Area). Each district is subdivided into chiefdoms, which have traditionally been the basic unit of local government outside the capital, Freetown. Each chiefdom is headed by a paramount chief, who is the head of a native administration. Since 2004, however, with the reinstatement of the Local Government Act, all thirteen districts and six major cities have elected local councils (GOSL 2004).⁴ The model of decentralization adopted in Sierra Leone assumes that traditional leaders at the chiefdom level (that is, the chiefs and the native administrations) will work alongside elected councilors, with the chiefs taking responsibility for rural security, justice, and land issues, and the local councils taking responsibility for service delivery and rural development.

A great deal of academic attention has focused on the political economy of the decade-long civil war that Sierra Leone endured during the 1990s—and on the role of diamonds in fuelling what some regard as a “greed-based” insurgency and others regard as a “grievance-based” rebellion.⁵ The causes of the country’s protracted conflict were complex, and an extended discussion of the events leading up to the war is beyond the scope of this chapter.⁶ Despite controversy about the specific causes of the war, there appears to be consensus that diamonds were a central feature of the conflict, principally because they allowed the various fighting factions to fund their warring activities. It has been argued that poor governance, overcentralization, and the development of an underclass were prime factors in creating the preconditions for war. The final report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission broadly endorses this position, blaming “the political elite of successive regimes in the post-independence era” for the country’s descent into chaos and destruction. The “greed, corruption and nepotism” of this group, the report argues, deprived the nation of its dignity, undermined the rule of law,

⁴ Local governments were abolished under President Siaka Stevens in the early 1970s. In May 2004, Sierra Leone successfully conducted its first local government elections in thirty-two years.

⁵ On greed-based insurgency, see, for example, Keen (2005), Richards (2003), and Smillie, Gberie, and Hazelton (2000). On grievance-based insurgency, see Richards (1996).

⁶ For further background on the conflict, see Kazumi Kawamoto, “Diamonds in War, Diamonds for Peace: Diamond Sector Management and Kimberlite Mining in Sierra Leone,” in this volume.



and reduced the people to a state of poverty. Youths in particular “lost all sense of hope for the future” (Sierra Leone TRC 2004, para. 95–97).

Local and national politics in Sierra Leone have long been shaped by diamonds. Most notably, in 1978, when the All People’s Congress government was in power, Siaka Stevens, the president of Sierra Leone, created a one-party state, and diamonds became a key strategic resource for upholding the dictatorial regime. Stevens’s strategy of using state power as an instrument of patronage was central to the creation of a “shadow state” (Reno 1995) in which diamond wealth was controlled by a small group of elites, while the majority of Sierra Leoneans remained poor and marginalized, and had little opportunity to participate in public decision making.⁷

⁷ Patronage, or patron-client relationships, involves reciprocal obligations and exchanges between different actors. As noted by Edward Gonzalez-Acosta, they are “compulsory pact[s], tacit or explicit, between the patron, an actor who has authority based on social capital, financial power, or some other resource, and the client, another actor that benefits from supporting or showing deference to the patron” (Gonzalez-Acosta 2007).

Patron-client relationships have had a long history of mediating access to resources in Sierra Leone, and the networks of power associated with diamond mining, in particular, have also shaped rural politics and identity, especially the relationships between youth and the so-called gerontocracy. One argument put forward by proponents of the “grievance thesis” is that customary institutions regulated by chiefs, particularly those that exercise power over marriage systems and youth labor, have long been the cause of great inequality and division in rural areas.⁸ In the diamondiferous regions of the country, the chiefs’ power and privilege have been strengthened by their patrimonial relationships with politicians and by their strong brokerage role in the artisanal diamond industry, where they have been central to maintaining the “tributor-supporter” system of mining governance (Zack-Williams 1995).⁹ Critics have suggested that these conditions provide little opportunity for rural subjects to participate in local decision making about resources or to make meaningful choices in their lives. On this basis, it has been argued that many Sierra Leoneans who were forced to endure years of injustice and oppression under a rural gerontocracy joined the rebel Revolutionary United Front during the war in order to exact revenge on the rural elite and sever their ties to customary obligations (Archibald and Richards 2002; Richards 2005; Peters 2006).

While elite capture in the diamond sector—whether initiated by politicians or chiefs—has a well-established history in Sierra Leone, efforts are currently being made to address such practices and to more equitably distribute the benefits of diamond resources.¹⁰ Recognizing that the sustainable development of the country’s valuable mineral resources—which include not only diamonds but also gold, rutile, bauxite, and iron ore—is a national priority, the government has made resources a central focus of participatory development plans such as the National Recovery Strategy and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (GOSL 2002, 2005). Across all sectors of the government, donor-driven policies and programs have proliferated that are designed to strengthen civil society and to create new democratic spaces for citizen engagement; many of these policies and programs originated in the decentralization program that began in 2004. In 2008, the government set up a presidential task force to reevaluate all mining policies, laws, and contracts; as of fall 2009, the review was still ongoing.

The current emphasis on decentralizing the government’s management of resources has added a layer of institutional complexity to an increasingly

⁸ On the grievance thesis, see especially the work of Paul Richards.

⁹ The tributor-supporter system of labor organization is essentially a form of modern-day slavery. Under this system, miners (tributors) are hired by a supporter (a mining license holder) and are provided with rice and the rudimentary tools needed for alluvial mining. The miners must then sell their diamonds back to the supporter, who usually pays below-market prices for them, ensuring that he recovers all the costs of his investment.

¹⁰ In the context of this chapter, elite capture occurs when high-status individuals use their prestige and power to manipulate decision-making processes and development agendas to obtain personal benefit.

complicated local governance system, in which new, formally defined spaces for citizen participation overlap with the traditional structures of native administrations. In the case of diamond management, some of the main conflicts have concerned revenue generation and collection—specifically, the collection of surface rents and license fees for diamond mining. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, there have also been disputes over how locally generated diamond revenue should be spent, and concerns about lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of the various local authorities involved in decision making.

COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT AND THE DACDF

The DACDF was formally approved by Sierra Leone’s Ministry of Mineral Resources in December 2001, as part of a broader reform program for the diamond sector initiated after the end of the civil war. The DACDF is funded by a small portion of the government’s 3 percent diamond export tax (amounting to 0.75 percent of the total export value), which is put into the DACDF to support small-scale community-managed development projects in diamondiferous regions.¹¹ To further strengthen social and infrastructural development, donors have been asked to match funding to the DACDF, although the likelihood of follow-through on this arrangement remains unclear (Temple 2005).

Under the DACDF, an unprecedented amount of diamond revenue has been returned to diamond-mining communities. The first tranche was made for January through June of 2001, and disbursements were made every six months thereafter until the end of 2006. The fund has accumulated more than US\$4.25 million in revenue, of which US\$3.5 million had been disbursed to diamondiferous communities by the end of 2006 (Temple 2008). Much evidence suggests that some chiefdoms and local councils have used the fund wisely, financing local infrastructure, education, health services, and vocational-skills training centers (Temple 2005). But considerable number of constraints—particularly in the early days of the initiative—have made it a challenge to implement the goals of the fund.

Challenges and shortcomings

Concerns about the DACDF focus primarily on three areas: effective use of funds, transparency and accountability in the use of funds, and citizen participation in decision making. Chiefdoms benefit from the DACDF in accordance with the number of mining licenses issued and the value of the diamonds recovered

¹¹ For example, in 2007, total collections for the DACDF amounted to Le2,513,614,868.59 (approximately US\$852,618). At the time of writing, DACDF figures were not available for 2008, but discussions with mining advisors at the Ministry of Mining Resources, in Freetown, revealed that 2008 collections were approximately 40 percent lower than those in 2007, because of decreased exports (thus, the 2008 total would be approximately US\$511,571).

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from their territory. In 2002, a series of ad hoc reports revealed that a number of chiefdoms were not making competent decisions about the use of the fund (see Temple 2005). Consequently, in 2003, the DACDF Coalition—which consists of representatives from the Ministry of Mineral Resources, the Ministry of Local Government, national and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the Anti-Corruption Commission, and the Miners' Union—was set up to ensure that the fund was used more effectively. Evidence suggests that since its creation, the coalition has helped chiefs improve their accountability for funds and their responsiveness to community interests. A report by Management Systems International, a development consulting firm based in Washington, D.C., notes, for example, that

constant sensitization, reporting on mis-spending, and refusal by central government to accept mismanagement of DACDF funds, has resulted in a remarkable turnaround in fiscal responsibility. Whereas fully sixty percent of the first tranche of DACDF funds disappeared, by the most recent tranche almost ninety percent of all funds were accounted for—including recovery of some of those funds missing initially (MSI 2004, 4).

Nevertheless, the government's High Level Diamond Steering Committee (HLDSC) raised concerns about the misuse of the DACDF, which eventually led to the suspension of disbursements after the July–December 2006 tranche was released (MMR 2009). Some of the primary concerns involved a continuing lack of transparency in the use of the fund; poor community awareness of the fund and its intended uses; and poor local participation in decision making about the use of the fund. These observations echoed the findings of a January 2003 study carried out by Search for Common Ground (SFCG), an NGO that assessed the status of DACDF projects undertaken in five chiefdoms and explored the levels of community participation in each project (SFCG 2003). Like the HLDSC, SFCG raised a number of concerns about transparency, accountability, and community involvement in decision making—in particular, consultations with youth and women. The project report notes that

cheques [from the DACDF] were received, but in most cases however, the signatories to the accounts were the Paramount Chief and his/her cronies (wife, District Officers and Treasury Clerks). The withdrawal of the funds as well as its use was questionable as community people were not represented in the process. The people knew about the fund but nothing about subsequent actions as they were not part of the process (SFCG 2003, 5).

In an effort to ensure that decision making about DACDF projects was carried out more equitably and accountably, a number of civil society organizations—including the National Advocacy Coalition on Extractives, an alliance of eighteen national and international NGOs whose work focuses on mining and other extractive industries—lobbied for the creation of chiefdom development committees (CDCs). To ensure representation of a broad range of community interests, each

CDC was to be composed of a wide cross-section of elected chiefdom residents. Reports suggest, however, that the CDCs have more often been composed entirely of members of the rural elite, such as section chiefs—stifling the notion of local ownership of the fund and further alienating many stakeholders, such as women and youth (Temple 2005).¹² The situation is vividly described by Daniel Moiwo, the director of GTZ in Kono District:¹³

The chief appoints the members of the CDC, and they are basically his group of “yes men.” The committee’s loyalty must be directed towards the chief, there is an understanding that the members will be given instructions on what to do, and that they will dance to the chief’s tune. But it is not supposed to be like that. . . . [The committee] should be made up of people who are elected because they are reliable, hardworking, truthful and willing to represent the community’s affairs honestly (Moiwo 2008).

A 2006 study of nineteen diamond-producing communities found that local governance factors have greatly inhibited transparency and accountability (NMJD 2006). The study noted that a “consistent trend of poor participation by grassroots stakeholders in project decision-making” explains why most DACDF projects are concentrated around chiefdoms or district headquarters towns (2006, 11). With few exceptions, the most important implication of poor participation is that the majority of local people do not readily identify with DACDF projects.

In short, while some chiefdoms have demonstrated the capacity to use the DACDF effectively, many have not. A 2007 article by Paul Jackson highlights the continuing misuse of the fund: “There is no accountability mechanism for ensuring that this cash is used for development, and it is extremely common to hear that local people complain of the chief’s abuse of the system in pocketing this money” (Jackson 2007, 100). The report produced by NMJD argues that because the CDCs have handled the funds at the local level, without any reporting mechanisms or systematic oversight from the Ministry of Mineral Resources, local abuses of power have flourished (NMJD 2006). One solution, the report suggests, is to establish a technical team with experience and skills in participatory community programming. The team could provide technical assistance to strengthen

¹² In Sierra Leone, the native administration of a chiefdom is composed of a hierarchy of chiefs, of which the paramount chief is the highest ranking. The rest of the hierarchy consists of lower-ranking chiefs and officials—the regent chief, chiefdom speaker, section chiefs, town chiefs, and village chiefs—all of whom have different responsibilities and functions. For a good overview of the chieftaincy system in Sierra Leone, see Campaign for Good Governance, Methodist Church of Sierra Leone, and Network Movement for Justice and Development (2009).

¹³ GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) was a federally owned German corporation that focused on international cooperation for sustainable development. GTZ is now GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit).

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community capacity and ensure that the CDC represents a genuine cross-section of the community; help communities identify their needs; and review proposals for development projects.

That such a team could successfully circumvent the hierarchical power structures within Sierra Leonean society and facilitate more equitable community participation remains unlikely, however. The power structures are deeply entrenched; in fact, a number of observers have pointed out that since the end of the war, power imbalances have continued to fuel a rift between youths and chiefs in the countryside. Paul Richards (2005), for example, suggests that the war itself was largely a product of this division. Glyn Williams notes that uncritical acceptance of the notion that the community is where development should take place runs the risk of depoliticizing development—that is, directing attention away from the wider power relationships within which local development occurs (Williams 2004).

Current status and future prospects

Unequal power relationships have always been prevalent in rural communities in Sierra Leone, but a recurrent theme in the history of diamond-mining regions, particularly in Kono District, has been tension between two groups: elites seeking greater control over diamond production, and indigenous communities seeking to maximize their own returns from the industry and to defend their putative rights and entitlements (Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010). At various points in history, from the colonial era to the present, the government has become involved in mediating these relationships, and diamonds have been an important strategic resource in such efforts. This was particularly the case for the Siaka Stevens' government, which took direct control of mining rights for Yengema and Tongo Field and used the authorization of mining licenses to build a strong alliance of political networks in Kono District. Since the end of the civil war, however, as mining has shifted toward more capital-intensive modes of extraction and has become increasingly attractive to larger companies that plan to pursue mechanized production, tensions between elites, local communities, and the government have reportedly become exacerbated. Discussions with the NMJD director for Kono District underscore this development:

What is very clear is that since the late 1980s, the influx of corporate entities into Kono has increased the tendency for conflict between chiefs, community land-holders and the government. Before the companies started to arrive, the situation was not nearly as bad. The chiefs are influential, so the companies want them on their side. They [the chiefs] are supposed to act on behalf of the people, but they are part of the deal and they are benefiting financially, so their hands are tied. And nobody questions the chief because they are afraid they will be victimized—the chief can use his power to make life difficult for you (Tongu 2008).

These tensions appear to extend to the CDCs, and have provoked significant controversy. Although the CDC is intended as a mechanism to allow participation

on the part of a wide range of community stakeholders—including marginalized groups, such as women and youth—the reality is that the chiefs and their confederates control decision making in the group.

Recognizing that the DACDF was not producing the intended development results, the Ministry of Mineral Resources froze the fund at the end of 2006; nevertheless, revenue allocations have continued to accrue, and four undisbursed deposits had accumulated by the end of 2008. In August 2008, with the hope of addressing many of the shortcomings previously noted, the Ministry of Mineral Resources developed a new set of procedures and guidelines. The new system features rigorous monitoring and an extensive paper trail: communities are now required to elect chiefdom project committees, which then submit a project proposal form for approval to a local review committee made up of the district administrator, the provincial administrator, and the government mines engineer, from the Ministry of Mineral Resources. If the local review committee accepts the community proposal, the work is put out to bid to local contractors in the chiefdom; this phase is followed by monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the funds are being spent properly.

In February 2009, to get the ball rolling, the government released the first of four backdated allocations (January–June 2007) without having received any community proposals. Communities that wish to access the remaining three allocations, however, must submit proposals. The strict new monitoring procedures are intended to improve the use and management of the fund and to increase accountability. But the underlying issue of how community members participate in decision making remains largely unaddressed. Whether communication between the CDCs and the community will improve—allowing for greater transparency in the selection of projects, the hiring of contractors, and payments to suppliers—remains to be seen.

LESSONS LEARNED

A number of useful lessons have emerged about two matters: the administration of the fund and the involvement of local communities in the fund's management.

Administration of the fund

The first disbursements from the DACDF were made directly to the paramount chiefs by the central government in the form of a check, which was often presented publicly in the local Court Barrie (the community town hall), with the entire community present. There was little effort to prepare the community for the arrival of the disbursements or to explain the origins of the revenue; a number of chiefs, as well as community members, were confused about the intended use of the fund. During these initial years, accountability was poor, and many chiefs were unable to explain how their DACDF allocations had been spent.

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Nor was there sufficient transparency or accountability at the central government level, where the DACDF revenues were collected and controlled. Even today, there is concern about the lack of transparency within the central government, where large amounts of diamond revenue continue to accrue. Such concerns echo a 2007 Human Development Report undertaken by the United Nations Development Programme, which points to accountability, transparency, and corruption as the key challenges of post-conflict governance (UNDP 2007). For decentralized resource management to be effective, there must be a clear line of accountability, both at the local and at the central government level. As Jesse Ribot (2002) has pointed out in other contexts, decentralization is more successful if there is a strong and accountable central government to guide and oversee it.

At the time the DACDF was initially proposed, in 2001, the Local Government Act had not been ratified; thus, the local councils, which were reinstated by the act and are now beneficiaries of the DACDF (receiving 20 percent of the disbursements for development projects), were not initially involved in the fund's implementation.¹⁴ Although it could be argued that the addition of another layer of governance, in the form of the local councils, should improve accountability and fund management, the reinstatement of the councils may actually have caused further conflict and confusion, which could have had an impact on the rational use of funds.¹⁵ Indeed, studies carried out elsewhere in Africa suggest that decentralized natural resource management initiatives do not always yield the intended social and economic benefits or the hoped-for participation of all members of society in decision making (Ribot 2004).

Community involvement in decision making

Invitations to participate in formally defined decision-making initiatives—such as the DACDF—do not always yield results that are consonant with idealized notions of democratic space. Consequently, one of the most important lessons is that citizen engagement is always mediated by existing power relationships,

¹⁴ Since the DACDF is not designed to share diamond revenue with all parts of the country, only local councils in diamondiferous districts get a share of the DACDF revenues.

¹⁵ In November 2008, a joint Ministry of Mineral Resources and local government “road show” was used to introduce the new DACDF guidelines to communities, chiefs, and district officials in all diamondiferous regions. Reports from the Ministry of Mineral Resources indicate that the amendments for the proposed use of the fund were the most contentious aspect of the guidelines. Historically, a portion of the DACDF had been used to pay administrative salaries (e.g., in the chiefdom administration, district councils, and town councils), but this is not permitted under the new regulations—a change that has been met with some resistance from those who had previously received part of their compensation through the DACDF.

including the modes of influence that participants exercise.¹⁶ As Andrea Cornwall rightly suggests, community participation may best be treated as a “situated practice”—one that is shaped and defined by political, social, cultural, and historical determinants (2002, 51).

On a positive note, Taylor Brown et al. (2006) argue that for all the destruction and disruption caused by Sierra Leone’s civil war, its resolution may have opened up new spaces for participation that could potentially change social rules and institutional practices. On the other hand, they also note that in many respects, Sierra Leonean society and politics have proven to be much less malleable than many observers had initially assumed. They suggest that many of the patrimonial institutions and practices that shaped natural resource access during the pre-conflict era may have been preserved, and in some cases even strengthened, in the post-conflict period. In such situations, where prewar power structures continue to endure, Frances Cleaver warns that there is a danger of participation being based on “over-optimistic notions of agency . . . combined with romantic ideas about groups and institutions” (2004, 271). In the case of Sierra Leone, the exercise of agency and citizenship rights is embedded in social relations that are defined by a highly unequal distribution of power and located within a messy web of micropolitics.

CONCLUSION

While this chapter focuses on just one initiative, the DACDF, the implications for future natural resource management and development in the diamond-bearing regions of Sierra Leone are far broader. Security concerns remain high in diamondiferous areas, where large numbers of uneducated, unemployed, and potentially volatile youth have little ability to make meaningful choices in their lives. The legacy of economic oppression and political exclusion from public decision making continues to be a source of considerable concern: history has shown that identity- and interest-based inclusion in public decision making can fragment communities and ignite conflict (Ribot 2004), and a number of observers have warned that, in the case of Sierra Leone, limiting or shutting down spaces of public participation risks recreating the inequalities that led to the country’s protracted civil war.¹⁷ Thus, if the government has indeed given priority to the sustainable development of mineral resources as a key part of its reconstruction program, while at the same time recognizing the need for increased public participation in resource governance, it must rethink how its policies and programs are playing out in practice. Even where citizens are invited to participate in intentionally designed institutional spaces, local actors’ full and fair participation in the decision-making process cannot be assumed.

¹⁶ This observation, of course, has relevance for community-led revenue-sharing programs for a wide range of natural resources, across sub-Saharan Africa and beyond.

¹⁷ See, for example, Hanlon (2005).

In the diamondiferous regions of Sierra Leone, unequal power relationships continue to shape resource use, livelihood options, participation in decision making, and development outcomes. Ultimately, these enduring political and economic struggles over resource access and control remain the greatest threats to the potential benefits of diamond-sector reforms, and to Sierra Leone's post-war transition to sustainable peace.

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