



Challenging Generations

Youths and Elders in Rural and Peri-Urban Sierra Leone

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The inaugural volume of the Justice and Development Working Paper Series consists of three papers on local-level dynamics of justice and governance in Sierra Leone. These essays — one about the interaction between local councils and traditional authorities, another one about the power relations between youth and their elders, and a third one about false development promises - are the products of qualitative research conducted in 2006 and 2007 by the World Bank Sierra Leone Justice for the Poor team. The papers aim to enrich our empirical understanding of the workings of justice and governance in the country. The goal of Justice for the Poor, in Sierra Leone and elsewhere, is to employ such knowledge to improve development practice.

Abstract

Local governance and justice in Sierra Leone traditionally have been dominated by male elders. Five years after the end of Sierra Leone's civil war and despite evidence that the exclusion and marginalization of youths may have helped fuel the 10-year civil conflict, this dominance remains. Alongside that lingering gerontocratic tradition, however, are clear signs that youths in both rural and peri-urban Sierra Leone are gaining a greater voice and agency in their communities. Change is limited and varies dramatically from one place to another, but youths overall are more likely than before the war to assert themselves and their opinions and to challenge authority.

Nonyouth community members, in turn, seem to perceive youths somewhat more positively and are less likely to impose heavy sanctions when the youths challenge or resist their authority. Youths also have a greater role in community governance, through new or strengthened formal positions or through less formal consultation, though too often such participation is limited or only symbolic. Youths, particularly in urban areas, have also helped create a number of new political and social spaces through which they have achieved a measure of self-governance and greater prominence and voice.

For individuals and institutions seeking to uphold the recommendations of Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and other bodies that have called for reforms to make governance and justice more inclusive and representative of youths, it is essential to understand and build upon these recent trends.

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Introduction

Traditionally, local governance and justice in Sierra Leone have been largely controlled by male elders, who hold the majority of leadership positions, dominate decision-making processes, and enjoy seniority-based sources of power and authority.¹ In addition to this tight political control, many elders are accused of heavy-handed, unjust treatment of less powerful community members, including youths, women, strangers, and those from weak lineages.² Many of the recent political and social analyses of Sierra Leone—including that of the country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)—have argued that resentment over this treatment helped fuel the 10-year civil conflict by driving young people away from their homes and into the fighting forces.³ Many of these fighters later returned to exact violent revenge against the elders and communities that they believed had exploited them. As a result, the TRC and others have argued for an urgent reform of governance and justice structures to make them more inclusive and representative of the nation’s youths. As the TRC recommended, “More avenues for the youth to express themselves and to realize their potential need to be created. Political space should be opened up so that the youth can become involved in governance and in the decision-making process.”⁴

This paper takes a detailed look at the relationship today between elders and youths in rural and peri-urban Sierra Leone, and on how that relationship might have changed during and after the country’s civil war of the 1990s. It focuses largely, though not exclusively, on political institutions (that is, those involved in governance and/or justice at a local level). The main source of data is in-depth qualitative research conducted in 2006–2007 by the World Bank’s *Justice for the Poor and Understanding Processes of Change in Local Governance* (J4P/LG) project, though the paper also draws on other recent research efforts and select literature. The first section of the paper reviews the research methodology. The second section discusses different understandings of the term “youth,” which sometimes cause confusion and contribute to misdirected policy efforts. The next sections review specific findings, followed by conclusions and recommendations for governmental and nongovernmental actors. The author hopes this information will be helpful to readers involved in

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efforts to empower youths or reform local governance and justice, as well as those interested more generally in avoiding the political and social conditions that helped drive the civil war.

Research Methodology

This paper is based primarily on research conducted in 2006 and 2007 as part of The World Bank's J4P/LG project, implemented in partnership with the Campaign for Good Governance and Timap⁵ for Justice, two civil society groups in Sierra Leone. Research was conducted throughout the country in a range of rural and peri-urban areas, aiming to reflect Sierra Leone's geographic, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity. (Very little research was conducted in the larger urban areas.) The bulk of research was carried out by a team of local researchers, who had received intensive training in qualitative research methods at the outset of the project and who worked under the close supervision and support of international J4P/LG members.

Research was primarily qualitative in nature, using anthropological and ethnographic techniques, particularly in-depth, semistructured interviews and participant observation. The team did not conduct formally constituted focus group discussions, but the nature of communal village life meant that individual interviews sometimes developed into group discussions. The main four research sites were in the Bombali (Northern Province), Moyamba and Bo (Southern Province), and Western Area Rural districts; in addition, team members spent time in another five of Sierra Leone's 13 districts (for a total of nine) during either the preliminary scoping or core qualitative research, or in the administration of a study of local customary law courts.⁶ In total, original qualitative research contributing to this paper totaled approximately 83 distinct person-weeks of time. Core research covered approximately 31 villages in four chiefdoms, and involved at least 460 interviews with 360 individuals. Other related research, particularly the preliminary scoping research, involved dozens of additional interviews in a wide range of locations.

Appendix A provides a list of the core research questions. For more information about the research methodology, including the rationale behind the selection of the main research sites, please see "Research Methodology: Justice for the Poor and Understanding Processes of Change in Local Governance," available at <http://www.worldbank.org/justiceforthepoor>.

What is a "Youth"?

The term "youth" is used loosely in Sierra Leone, and often means very different things to different groups of people. Policy makers, particularly in government and international agencies, tend to understand youth as a finite, age-defined category. Both domestic and international agencies working in Sierra Leone typically use the Sierra Leone government's official definition: male and female individuals aged 15–35. This is considerably broader than international standards. (The United Nations (UN), for instance, defines youth as those aged 15–24.⁷) According to this official, age-based definition, youths comprise 34 percent of Sierra Leone's population, of which 11 percent are 15–19 years old, 8 percent are 20–24, and 15 percent are 25–35 years old.⁸

Among the general public, however, and often among individual representatives of the government or civil society, youth is a much more ambiguous category, and one that is socially rather than age-defined.⁹ A "youth" is someone in a particular stage of life: typically unmarried, landless, and without

economic or political power. (This is true in many African societies, in which a social definition of youth tends to trump an age-based definition.) Even if a man is no longer chronologically young, he can still be considered a youth—and not be considered an adult—as long as he lacks such features of adulthood as a wife and a source of income. This is a particular issue for men, which is perhaps one reason why the term “youth” is usually understood to refer more to men than to women. Usage also depends on the context; in relation to communal labor, for example, the term “youth” is often used to cover all able-bodied men.

Elders Among Youths

“Some people are far... older than others and they still refer to themselves as youths. Some are between the ages of 45–50 years and they call themselves youths. So when the young ones who are the real youths, say 18–25 year olds, meet with these adults, it is the adults that dominate the discussion. The fact is that a young boy is afraid to overrule anything suggested by the man whom he considers as his senior.”

- A 44-year-old man, himself considered a youth by many in his chiefdom

“Youth” also often has a negative connotation in Sierra Leone, as a result of the country’s recent political history—not only the decade-long civil war, but the era of state collapse that preceded it. As a recent report by the World Bank and ENCISS¹⁰ explained, “the term youth in political terms often refers to young, ‘idle’ men or the ‘lost generation,’ referring to predominantly men who are excluded, unable to provide for a family and are perceived as a potential security threat.”¹¹ The report also documents the way adult participants in focus group discussions perceive young, particularly male workers: as “lacking the appropriate work ethics” and “lazy, idle and not reliable.”¹² The war itself (and its aftermath) may have extended the footloose, insecure period of life referred to as “youth” by delaying young people’s—especially men’s—ability to “settle down,” find steady employment, and start families.¹³

Another complicating factor in understanding this term in Sierra Leone is the preponderance of people well past the officially defined age range of 15–35 still calling themselves, and claiming positions of power as, “youth leaders.” Of the 19 youth leaders interviewed for this research—representing village, section, and chiefdom levels—only 42 percent were within Sierra Leone’s official youth age range, and most of those fell near the top of that range. None would qualify as youths by the UN standard. Only two were under the age of 30, and one of those was not a general youth leader but the head of a social group in the peri-urban Western Area research site. An additional six were aged 30–35; six were aged 36–40; and five were older than 40, including one who was approximately 55 years old.¹⁴

It is unclear what drives this phenomenon of dominance by “elders among youths.” In part, it probably reflects the competing definitions (age versus social status) discussed above. It could also be a result of ambivalence among elders and chiefdom authorities about having youths represented in chiefdom governance; chiefs generally have a say in selecting or approving youth leaders, and they may prefer older individuals. Or it could represent a grab for power by people reaching the end of their youth but not yet included among ruling elders, and therefore reluctant to relinquish the position of youth leader.

For the purpose of this paper, the authors leave it to respondents to define themselves and others as they see fit—as “youths” or “nonyouths”—but their ages will also be reported whenever possible to allow the reader to identify where the age-based and socially based definitions diverge.

Resentment and Revenge: Youth-Elder Tension in Recent Sierra Leonean History

Analyses of the modern sociopolitical history of Sierra Leone often highlight the marginalization and disenfranchisement of youth—followed by their resentment, rebellion, and revenge—as an important theme and driver of recent historical events.

Scholars (as well as Sierra Leoneans themselves) have argued at length about the causes of Sierra Leone's civil war, with some emphasizing the role of greed, particularly the quest for control of mineral resources, and others the importance of social and historical grievances.¹⁵ The latter group tends to emphasize the effects of poverty, exclusion, and injustice, especially affecting youth. Young people, they argue, were excluded from access to power, economic opportunity, or even marriage. Young men, particularly those from weak lineages (“strangers” and those who lacked the right to hold land or contest for chieftaincy), were forced to trade their labor for land or marriage, and often found themselves in situations approximating indentured servitude.¹⁶

Youths also believed themselves to be the victims of heavy-handed treatment by chiefs. A common story—in the literature but even more so among local people—is of youths forced to flee their villages because they could not pay a heavy fine that had been levied against them.¹⁷ Many of the same young people then joined the rebels or other fighting forces and returned to exact (often violent) revenge against the authorities they believed had wronged them. As one former combatant from the Civilian Defense Forces (CDF), cited in a 2002 paper, said, “Most of the young men and women were suffering... our chiefs and some elderly men were doing wrong to our young men and women... some young men prefer(red) to go and join the RUF, either to take revenge or to protect themselves.”¹⁸ The country's TRC echoed this analysis, finding that “many young men joined the RUF voluntarily because they were disaffected. This trend demonstrates the centrality of bad governance, corruption, all forms of discrimination and the marginalization of certain sectors of society among the causes of conflict.”¹⁹

In fact, the findings of the TRC have much to say about youths, marginalization, and war. It found, for example, that “the majority of the fighting forces were composed of the young, the disgruntled, the unemployed and the poor.”²⁰ In its primary findings related to youth, the report states that “the political exclusion of the youth prompted some of them to assert themselves forcefully into the political process,” and that among the “causes of the conflict that prompted many youth people to go to war” were “elitist politics, rampant corruption, nepotism and bad governance.”²¹ The TRC also found evidence of a search for vengeance in the actions of some of the fighting forces; as it says, “Chiefs, Speakers, elders and other social, cultural and religious figureheads were singled out for humiliation and brutal maltreatment by combatants of the NPFL and the RUF... The conflict was often used as a vehicle for carrying out pre-existing grudges, grievances, and vendettas.”²²

Another factor contributing to this ultimately explosive prewar social and political situation was a period of economic collapse, which led in turn to a failure of the patrimonial system and a sense of despair, particularly among rural youths. In prosperous times, elders and powerful “big men” would provide young people with access to work, education, marriage, and other forms of privilege in return for political loyalty. During the economic deterioration of the 1980s, this system began to break down. When their obedience failed to reap the traditional short-term rewards of economic and social opportunities, and when they began to doubt the possibility of reaping such rewards in the long run or becoming “big men” themselves, young people began to feel exploited and hopeless.²³ Some then chose to seek revenge and opportunity through alternative (violent) means.

The TRC and others have argued for an urgent reform of governance and justice structures to make them more inclusive and representative of the nation's youths. As the TRC said, "The denial of a meaningful political voice to the youth has had devastating consequences for Sierra Leone. More avenues for the youth to express themselves and to realize their potential need to be created. Political space should be opened up so that the youth can become involved in governance and in the decision-making process."²⁴ The TRC recommended that the "youth question... be viewed as a national emergency."²⁵ Failing to do so, they argued, may drive Sierra Leone back into war. As one study based on interviews with former fighters found, "many ex-combatants openly stated their readiness to return to the bush to fight if the democratic process does not result in a better deal for excluded youth."²⁶ The same study, which examines the experience of youth during and after war in a number of countries in Africa (including Sierra Leone), argues that, "the antidote to anti-social violence is to involve young people in the making of society."²⁷ Of course, as many observers have commented, it is important to ensure that youth involvement—like all citizen involvement—is managed in a constructive, nonviolent way, and that demands for rights are accompanied by assumption of responsibilities.

Views on Youth in Authority

A national household survey conducted in Sierra Leone in 2007 asked respondents to choose which of two statements they agreed with:

Responsible young people can be good leaders.

or

Only older people are mature enough to be leaders.

Nationwide, 76 percent of respondents agreed with the first statement and 24 percent with the second statement. Not surprisingly, support for the first statement was much higher among younger respondents.

Respondents in Freetown were the most likely to trust youth in leadership positions, and those in other large towns the least likely. Among ethnic groups, the Kono were the most accepting and the Fullah the least accepting. (IRCBP 2008)

Changing Norms and Power Relations: Youths and Elders in Postwar Sierra Leone

It is clear from the J4P/LG research that relationships between elders and youths in all research sites are changing in significant ways, though more slowly than some might hope. This echoes findings by other authors, such as Archibald and Richards (2002), who find that, "Youth and women now assert rights as individuals where once they would have been restrained by deference. Elders agree that deference has collapsed."²⁸ Certainly seniority remains a fundamental source of power and authority in rural and peri-urban areas of the country, and the participation of youths is still limited by tradition and social norms.²⁹ Two common Krio phrases invoked by respondents to explain why certain people cannot challenge others are "borbor na borbor" (a young boy is just a young boy) and "u no sae big one na big one" (you have to realize that an elder is always an elder). An elderly male town chief (age 82) from a remote Moyamba chiefdom told researchers, "It is not right for a child to challenge the town or chiefdom"; the "child" he was referring to was 44 years old.

Nonetheless, youths are gaining a greater voice and agency in their communities, and are more likely than before the war to assert themselves and their opinions and to challenge authority. Nonyouth community members, in turn, seem to perceive youths somewhat more positively and are less likely to impose heavy sanctions. Clearly, the balance of power between youths and elders is shifting. What is not entirely clear, however, is to what extent this shift represents an increase in the power and

agency of young people, and to what extent a decrease in the power of elders and other adults.³⁰ Ultimately, however, it is the shift in relative power that matters the most.

Perceptions of Youth

Though the term “youth” can still have a negative connotation (as discussed in the section “Who is a Youth?” above) it seems that community members and authorities increasingly see youths as agents who can work on behalf of the community. A 2007 national household survey measured people’s views on young people in leadership positions and found that a vast majority supported the statement that responsible young people can be good leaders (see box). One 42-year-old youth leader from Bombali district argued that youths had gained a sense of responsibility in developing their communities, and were being perceived differently by authorities; before the war, in contrast, “chiefs did not recognize the importance of youths. They used to victimize us.” Another youth leader from the northern province explained that youths were predominantly associated before the war with bands of thugs assembled and dispatched by political parties to intimidate opposition supporters.³¹ Now, he said, they are seen more positively, as agents for development.

Sometimes communities and authorities look to youths to represent and defend the community’s interests. One example is a case involving a fraudulent development practitioner who came to a Bo District town promising to rebuild houses that had been burnt down during the war. After collecting money from residents in registration fees (and bribes) and leaving them to build the houses to “wall height”—promising to return with cement and roofing materials to finish the construction—the man disappeared. It was several young men from the chiefdom who initiated the idea of trying to find the man and hold him accountable, and they received the support—both political and financial—of chiefdom elders and authorities, including the paramount chief. The young men eventually tracked the fraudster down and reported him to the police.³²

Youths in Positions of Authority

There are a number of ways in which youths seem to be more able or likely to take on positions of authority in postwar Sierra Leone. One example is the position of “youth leader,” which in some places existed long before the war but which seems to have become both more common and more formal. In part this may be in response to outside intervention and to development practitioners who demand balanced representation by gender and age. In addition, the Ministry of Youth and Sports under the last government³³ spearheaded an effort to formalize youth representation in a system of elected youth leaders at chiefdom, district, and national levels, though this was only partially implemented at the time of research, and the current government³⁴ is developing a National Youth Commission with representatives from all districts. Today, most villages and many chiefdoms and chiefdom sections—as well as some districts—have a designated youth leader.³⁵ The positions themselves range in formality and in method of selection, with some elected, others selected by consensus by the relevant community members, and others appointed by the town, section, or even paramount chiefs. At least some civil society representatives, however, argue that there is a large gap and relatively little coordination between the formal structures at district and national level and the community-level youth leaders.³⁶

The role of community-level youth leaders is quite limited, primarily involving mobilizing their colleagues for communal work and resolving some intragroup disputes, although that role may be increasing slowly (see below). Indeed, there is some evidence that the positions are being seen more formally and more positively. One 42-year-old youth leader from Bombali district, for instance, argued that the position of youth leader had become more formal and prominent after the war.

Another youth leader from the northern province agreed, arguing that youths are more organized and recognized by the government. (The importance of this trend may be undermined by the dominance of “elders among youths,” as discussed elsewhere in this paper.)

In some communities, other positions that were previously held only by elders have now been opened to youths. These include positions in traditional (customary) institutions, as well as newer, more “modern” institutions. In one chieftom in the northern province, for example, a local human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) convinced the local (customary law) court, whose members rotated every 90 days, to include one youth and one woman representative among the members.³⁷ This change was viewed positively by at least some of the chieftom elders, who told researchers that it made youths and women less likely to complain about court decisions. In a different case, the rules for the selection of town headman in the Western Area—the only part of the country without a paramount chieftaincy system of governance—were changed to provide for a secret ballot election that nonnative residents of any ethnic group could contest. A young businessman from a “stranger” ethnic group won the election, ousting an older man who had served as town headman for 11 years and provoking anger and resentment of many members of the previous ruling elite.³⁸ Many young people in that town now feel they have a greater voice and more access to decision making in the community.

It is important to note that the individuals holding youth leadership positions may be drawn largely from local elites, and may not represent the majority of youths.³⁹ For instance, they may be members of traditional ruling lineages or of economically powerful groups, or they may have greater access to education or links with powerful individuals in Freetown or elsewhere. If true, this would mirror the reality of many other leadership positions in Sierra Leone, and raises important questions about who continues to be excluded from power. (See “Those Left Behind” below.)

Youths have also created (or have combined with nonyouths to create) a number of new political and social spaces—many of them horizontal, interest-based associations—through which they have achieved a measure of self-governance and greater prominence and voice. Prominent among these are associations of motorbike taxi drivers active in urban areas,⁴⁰ the majority of whose members are young male former combatants. These associations, some of which have quite elaborate constitutions and governance structures, have provided an alternative avenue for collective action, decision making, and engagement with authorities, including police and chiefs, apart from the traditional systems of gerontocracy and patrimonial relationships.⁴¹ In part, the power of these bike riders—and their ability to stand up to traditional authorities—come from their ability to earn a nonagricultural living. As one author says, “In all provincial areas, chiefs had hitherto restricted young men through their control of the greatest resource – land – of the main occupation (agriculture) of provincial inhabitants. Bike riders are young people and land is not the resource they need for bike riding, thus chiefs are at a loss as to how to control the bike riders.”⁴²

Other interest-based associations involving a large number of youths, many of which are not new to the postwar era but may now be more common or more prominent, include fish or gari sellers associations and social or sports clubs, which can be found in peri-urban and rural areas as well as urban centers.⁴³ (The J4P team did not look specifically at these groups, though that would be a worthwhile area for further research.) Also common are youth labor gangs (male and female), which share work on a rotational basis and/or sell the group’s labor to nonmembers,⁴⁴ as well as cross-generational labor or communal farming groups with a predominantly young membership. As one government participant in a discussion meeting for this paper argued, these mixed-age groups can

help to empower youths, while also giving them a forum to engage constructively and as equals with older group members.

Another new sphere of voice and engagement for young people in Sierra Leone is community radio, a thriving sector in postwar Sierra Leone in which youths have been at the forefront.⁴⁵ As of 2005, there were 17 community radio stations on air across the country, alongside 15 other domestic radio stations and four international stations.⁴⁶ Many of the community radio stations are staffed and managed by young people.⁴⁷ Radio has become an important source of news and information, as well as an outlet for concerns and ideas, for people of all ages in Sierra Leone.⁴⁸ Arguably, the benefit of this new social space is felt most by those often excluded from traditional forums for information and debate, including youths.

Consultation and Inclusion of Youths

Formalizing the position of youth leader is one specific example of a broader phenomenon of (nonyouth) authorities including youths or their representatives in chiefdom governance. This inclusion, however, is highly limited. Most community-level decisions are still made as they long have been—that is, by a small group of predominantly male elders.⁴⁹ In accordance with the Krio expression to “hang heads,” this group comes together to consult and decide on the most important matters. Rarely is decision-making power wielded individually, but rarely too is it shared beyond this close circle of advisors. As a 53-year-old female community member in a remote Moyamba chiefdom said, “Everything about our villages is decided by the leaders at the top of the chain of command in the chiefdom ... Whatever we are told we accept and if something is requested from us we pay without any protest.”⁵⁰ As a deputy village chief (male, 50 years old) in a remote Moyamba chiefdom said, “Most times, we the elders meet to take decisions without the youths and the youths accept whatever we say because they are our children.” Even attendance and participation in community meetings are lower for youths than for nonyouths, according to a recent national household survey.⁵¹

Many community members interviewed for this research, including youth leaders and other young people, contend that youths are more often consulted now on chiefdom governance decisions than before the war. A closer investigation, however, shows that this consultation is usually extremely limited, and often is not actually a matter of consulting youths (in the sense of soliciting and incorporating their views) but of informing them about a decision already made. It remains to be seen if these are the first steps in a slow process of cultural change—“small small” as one might say in Krio—or a façade of involvement unlikely to lead to any real change.

There is some evidence that village-level decision making may be somewhat more inclusive than chiefdom-level decision making, and may have changed more dramatically since before the war. In a Bo chiefdom, for example, chiefdom-level decisions were generally described as controlled by the paramount chief, his brother, and other close associates. At a village level in the same chiefdom, however, a 26-year-old male youth leader described a much more inclusive process, which he said represented a dramatic change since before the war.⁵² From another community in the same chiefdom, a different youth leader offered an example of a recent agricultural business unit (ABU) seed rice project. He said the whole community, including elders, women, and youth, met several months before to decide how to manage the project. During the meeting, different speakers offered opposing views, but in the end, the community reached an agreement to loan the seed to farmers and to charge interest.⁵³

There are several ways in which youths' inclusion is limited, even in places and situations where they are included—to some extent—in decision making. First, as noted above, it may be true that youth representatives are drawn from within local elites, and may not represent the views or concerns of the majority of youths. (This is not a hypothesis tested by the J4P/LG team, but it seems likely, given other power dynamics at a local level.) Second, youth participation is frequently limited to certain types of decisions, such as those related to the provision of communal labor. They remain excluded from other decisions, particularly those involving (financial) resources. As one female youth leader (age 42) from Bo district said, “Youths are of the opinion that they are not ... consulted by leaders when better opportunities and money come for the chiefdom, rather they always call on them only when it is time for chiefdom labor.”⁵⁴ A section-level youth leader in a remote Bombali chiefdom agreed. “Anything that involves money, they don't involve us,” he said.⁵⁵ A former youth leader (male and 37 years old) from Bo district said “We only get announcement over the radio that an amount of money is given to [our] chiefdom for development purpose but the authorities do not call meetings to tell us how these moneys are spent.”

In fairness, it is not only youths who are excluded from decisions about the management of financial resources. Even section chiefs and other authorities claim they know very little about how much revenue comes into the chiefdom or how those funds are spent. Ordinary community members know even less. “Our chiefdom authorit[ies] tell us about funds, but we don't know how these funds are used by the paramount chief,” said one 40-year-old male section chief from Bo district. “We don't even know about our own financial share from [mining revenue].” A 70-year-old male town chief from the same chiefdom agreed: “I hardly hear about funds coming for the chiefdom from the paramount chief. He decides on chiefdom funds without our consent. We the town chiefs can't question him.”⁵⁶ Another respondent, a 47-year-old male tribal authority from a remote Moyamba chiefdom said, “They collect tax from us, but we don't know what they do with the proceeds. Maybe the revenue is eaten [stolen] by our chiefs. We don't know what they do with chiefdom funds.” Even where decision making is becoming more inclusive and participatory, decisions about money remain the province of (male) chiefdom elites. “We are sometimes involved in decision making at community level, but sometimes we are not—especially when money matters arise,” said a 55-year-old female community member in Bo district. Many people admitted that they would not even ask how revenue is spent, out of fear of repercussions for their curiosity.

A third common limitation on youth involvement is that such involvement is often merely superficial—“informing” rather than consulting about local governance. Youths (and other groups) may be present when decisions are made, or may be informed about them shortly thereafter, but they are not actually asked for their opinions. This is not new. As described in the 2004 World Bank social assessment, “There is often an appearance of consultation at village meetings. Women and youths regularly attend Youths are represented by ‘leaders of youth’... [But] the real decisions are made when a group of elders retires from the meeting to ‘hang heads.’”⁵⁷

The J4P/LG researchers identified similar dynamics. Youth respondents frequently told the researchers that chiefs involved or consulted them on decisions. When the researchers probed further, however, they found that the youths actually meant that chiefs informed them about decisions already made by the elders, and then involved the youths in implementing the decisions. One male youth leader in a remote northern chiefdom told researchers repeatedly that chiefs did call on youths to take part in decision making. When he was asked more specifically whether the youths were asked for their opinions or otherwise allowed to contribute to the discussion, he laughed out loud and said no. Of course not, he seemed to suggest, that would be ridiculous. Similarly, a 43-year-

old male youth leader in another northern chiefdom told researchers that youths were consulted by the chiefs; however, when clarifying, he explained that the paramount chief and chiefdom committee (composed of section chiefs) made the decisions first, and then informed the youth leader if the decision concerned him or her. He said this was right, that the elders should be the ones to decide.

This comment raises an important point: gerontocratic control over decision making persists in part because many people—including youths—consider this control legitimate. Elders run things not only because they have the means to suppress dissent, but because they are widely perceived as the right people to lead. Youth voice and involvement will increase only to the extent that such involvement is perceived as legitimate by local populations.

Youths Challenging Authority

This limited degree of consultation notwithstanding, researchers did find cases in which youths expressed their opinions—often loudly, and sometimes successfully—on community issues. Youths are also more likely than their elders to challenge authorities.

The greater willingness among communities and individuals to challenge authorities now than before the war is notable,⁵⁸ and it seems that youths are often (though not always) at the forefront of these challenges. “In those days chiefs were much feared so it was not usual for people to defy their orders... After the war things have changed dramatically,” said one 40-year-old male teacher in a Bo chiefdom. “Before the war, whatever the authorities said was final,” but this has changed, said a 47-year-old male tribal authority from Moyamba district. Other authors have also identified this trend, concluding, for example, that “rural people are now more prepared to challenge authority and seek accountability”⁵⁹ and that “the expectations of youth... are changing and they are more likely to challenge customary authority or simply exit the system of rural governance by migrating to Freetown or the mining areas.”⁶⁰

Two types of challenges were particularly notable: challenges over resources and challenges over the use of communal labor.

Challenges Over the (Mis)use of Resources

Resource-related challenges were less common and did not always involve youths, and will therefore be discussed more briefly here. (For more details, see unpublished case studies available at <http://www.worldbank.org/justiceforthe poor>.) One of the most interesting cases of this sort, however, involved a protagonist considered by himself and others to be a “child,” though he was actually beyond the official definition of a youth. The case, recounted in the box below, reveals the difficulty youths face in confronting authorities, and the pressure on them from their elders to be “respectful.”

Case 1: Claiming a Fair Share of Rice

In 2004, the government gave 100 bags of rice to the chiefdom officials of a poor rural chiefdom in the southern province. The “paramount chief and other chiefdom authorities” then distributed 60 of these 100 bags equally among the 12 section chiefs for them to distribute in their sections. (No one objected publicly to the 40 bags held by the chiefdom authorities.)

In one section this distribution turned contentious. The section chief left town for a funeral and asked the town chief and other elders to distribute three of the five bags in his absence, holding two aside for the chiefs and for a secret society swearing ceremony. (Sodalities, commonly known as secret societies, are sacred social groups with a very long history in West Africa, to which the majority of Sierra Leoneans belong.) At the distribution, some of the community members objected; the main resisters included an imam in his thirties and a 40-year-old former town headman (whom we'll call Mohammed) from a prominent local family. (Though not technically a youth in chronological terms, Mohammed is still considered a "child" by many community members, and even referred to himself as such.)

The town chief bowed to their objections and distributed four (rather than three) of the five bags of rice. Upon his return, the section chief was furious and reported the matter to the paramount chief, accusing the protagonists of instigating a challenge to his authority. The paramount chief sent a delegation of elders to investigate, and they quickly convinced all but one of the accused to apologize and pay a small fine. "The apology showed a sign of respect for authorities," said one of the accused. The imam agreed. "They are chiefs and we should not argue [with] them, that is why I apologized," he said.

One of the men, however—the one we've named Mohammed—refused to apologize. "Why should I, since I have done no wrong?" he later said. The investigators reported back to the paramount chief about his refusal and his "attitude." Weeks later, Mohammed was called to appear before the paramount chief, a woman. She again gave him the opportunity to apologize, and he again refused. He began to argue with the section chief in front of the paramount chief, and when warned by the chieftom police not to do so, he left without saying good-bye.

Seventeen days later, he received a criminal summons for insulting the paramount chief, and was called to the chieftom headquarters to appear in court. Upon arrival, he was charged with contempt for allegedly arriving late, and fined Le 50,000 (more than \$18, a large amount in rural Sierra Leone). The paramount chief was not present.

The case was adjourned and Mohammed then went to the customary law office (CLO) in the provincial headquarter town. He was told by office staff that he had to first let the case run its course, as the CLO only dealt with appeals of cases already decided. "I told him I was afraid since my case is against the paramount chief and it is her land," Mohammed said. Then he returned to his chieftom.

The chieftom elders—including several section chiefs and Mohammed's own grandfather, the section chief's elder brother—began to strongly pressure Mohammed to apologize to the paramount chief and bring the case to an end. "I was really under tension," Mohammed said. "But I told [my grandfather] that if I do that, tomorrow she [the paramount chief] will do it to another person... He said I was right but he wanted the problem to end." As his grandfather said, "I told [him]... to beg because the case was against the authorities... This is a very small section for us to quarrel against each other, we are all related."

Eventually Mohammed agreed to apologize. His grandfather and several section chiefs went with him to beg on his behalf. According to the section chief who initiated the case, Mohammed got down on the ground before the chiefs in order to apologize. He then paid at least Le 30,000 in "court fees."

A great many people were there to witness this event. The "entire chieftom was invited," according to one respondent. As Mohammed himself says, "On the day I was to appear in court, the court was very full of ordinary people, section chiefs, town chiefs who had come to see the man who had dared to challenge the paramount chief."

After the apology, the paramount chief and section chief were both pleased and ready to move on. "The paramount chief... said I am her son and I should let things be," Mohammed recounts. The section chief said he was "happy" once Mohammed apologized, and that now they are "living happily." He continued,

“[Mohammed] now consults me in most of his undertakings and I also consult him when I want to take decisions.” The section chief is now supporting Mohammed to take over as town chief.

As for Mohammed himself, the case was a bitter experience. “I was trembling with rage,” he said of the day when he was forced to apologize. “I wanted to know whether a child is never right in this community.” Years later, he was still bitter about the outcome. “It is still fresh in my mind and I have not forgiven them. Even on judgment day I won’t forgive,” he said.

Opinions on the case, predictably, are sharply divided. Several young men interviewed supported Mohammed. “I think [he] was pursuing justice,” said the 33-year-old court clerk. “[Mohammed] is somebody who knows his rights, and he was fighting for justice,” said a taxpayer of the same age. “I love him because he stands for the truth. How can authorities get a bag and one for the section chief? It was not right.”

The town chief had a different perspective. He argued that people should be grateful for whatever rice they get, and not demand more. “It is a gift,” he said, “whoever receives it should be happy.” He also referenced Mohammed’s youth. “It is not right for a child to challenge the town or chiefdom. An authority should be respected,” he said.

This case and the others in which people stood up against corrupt authorities are notable not for the occurrence of a misuse of funds—which is extremely common in Sierra Leone—but for the fact that community members actually dared to object. In the vast majority of corruption cases recounted to J4P/LG researchers, community members did nothing; they did not speak out to demand accountability and did not seek punishment for those responsible.⁶¹ Reasons for failing to speak out are largely predictable: a fear of the consequences, a sense of futility, or both. After hearing Mohammed’s bitter experience, it is easy to see why people might not want to protest. In addition, people in several sites—including some local authorities—reported that they feared asking questions about the use of funds for development projects, lest they be accused of blocking development resources coming to their area; indeed, officials managing such projects were alleged to manipulate this fear.⁶² Finally, many people likely believe it is simply not right to challenge authorities.

It is perhaps more difficult to find an answer to the opposite question: why people *do* sometimes dare to speak out. However, a few factors seem to emerge from the cases collected by the J4P/LG team. First, challenges tend to be raised collectively or by individuals who are themselves relatively powerful or in positions of authority. Second, the authorities challenged are usually themselves relatively minor or weak; there were no direct challenges to paramount chiefs, for example, but there were several to town chiefs. Third, the resources involved tend to be relatively small. Generally speaking, people do not dare to challenge in cases involving larger sums—a tractor, mining revenue, government social security payments—perhaps in part because such cases also involve more powerful authorities. Finally, a track record of corruption might make a chief or other authority more susceptible to challenge.

In the end, it is rare for people to challenge their authorities over the use of resources, and rarer still for them to do so successfully. As the case above illustrates, there can be severe sanctions for daring to stand up to the powers that be. This is perhaps particularly true for youths, who face opinions like that of the section chief quoted in that case: “It is not right for a child to challenge the town or chiefdom.”

Challenges Over Communal Labor

Challenges over communal labor were more common than challenges over the use of resources, though they were not always more successful, and were more likely to involve youths. They also, like the rice case and other challenges over the use of resources, often provoked a strong response by chiefdom authorities.

Communal labor is a longstanding tradition in rural Sierra Leone, but it has also long been a source of tension and conflict. (As one discussion of “community obligatory labor” in the colonial period states, “Fining, flogging and jail were punishments for young men who tried to escape.”⁶³) The practice continues today, and has been integrated into many postwar development projects requiring beneficiary communities to contribute labor and/or materials. A nationwide household survey confirmed that all members of the community participate in communal work, but men carry the larger burden. (See box for details.)

Why Not Challenge Authorities?

“I am an ordinary person, I don’t have money so I can’t challenge authorities... That is not part of our culture.”

- An imam in his thirties, regarding the rice case recounted above

“No one is able to confront [the court chairman] because they fear that he will victimize them. They are not even talking about it to anyone. All they do is to murmur in their corners.”

- A community member, regarding a tractor donated for public use but used by the chief and court chairman

“If the person giving you something says you have to wait and tolerate, you have to do so. [Posin wai dae gi u, if e say u for bear, u for bear.]”

- A community member

Who Provides Communal Labor?

Data from a 2007 household survey (IRCBP, 2008, p. 41–42)

Nationwide, 32 percent of respondents reported participating in road brushing or town cleaning during the previous month, while 13 percent had provided labor for another community project. Gender differences were substantial: 40 percent of men but just 23 percent of women participated in road brushing or town cleaning, while 18 percent of men versus 9 percent of women contributed labor for another community project. (One factor that might not be captured by the survey is women’s work in providing food and water to the laborers.)

Participation rates were higher in smaller communities. Forty percent of respondents (male and female) in villages report participating in road work or town cleaning in the last month compared with 26 percent in large towns and 4 percent in Freetown.

Survey data differed somewhat from qualitative findings when it came to youth participation. In interviews, most people spoke of communal labor as something that falls primarily to the youths. The household survey found that respondents 35 years or younger were significantly more likely than nonyouths to engage in road brushing or town cleaning (35 percent versus 30 percent) but equally likely to contribute labor for other projects. This may be partly explained by the fact that the survey took a purely chronological or age-based definition of youth, while the definition in communities, as discussed earlier, is much more complex.

Respondents who contributed labor to road brushing or town cleaning reported spending an average of 9

hours on such activities in the previous month, while those who provided labor for community projects spent an average of 15 hours. This calculates to somewhere between 18 and 30 minutes per day.

Certain types of communal labor that may have once been widespread and compulsory are now nonexistent or voluntary. This is true particularly for what is often known as “chief’s work”: providing unpaid labor on a chief’s farm. (This was made illegal in the 1950s, but research suggests the practice persisted, in some areas at least, for decades thereafter. Respondents from all three provincial research sites said that chief’s work was no longer compulsory, though in some areas chiefs still did request “voluntary” farm work, and in at least one chiefdom, people reported feeling pressured by town and section chiefs to oblige the request of the paramount chief.⁶⁴) Chief’s work seems to have been in decline already before the war,⁶⁵ but is even more rare today. “Before... chiefs used force,” said one 42-year-old female community member from a small village in Bombali district, “but now... if they want us to help them with some work they will appeal to us... they will call a meeting ... and will give some money to people to help them work in their farms, but it is not compulsory. Now we know our rights.” A 75-year-old male section chief from a larger town in the same chiefdom agreed. “Now we have human rights and if you want people to work for you, you have to pay them,” he said.

Other types of work are still considered compulsory. The most common of these is roadwork: the construction and maintenance (“brushing”) of footpaths, roads, and bridges. Also common is the construction of community buildings such as schools or clinics. Sometimes communities will decide to build or repair a structure like this on their own, relying upon the free labor of community residents; other times, labor is part of a community’s required contribution to a project funded by the government, a donor, or an NGO. Typically, people are fined if they do not participate in these types of communal work, sometimes known as “town work,” as in the case below (“Communal Labor and a Road through the Bush”). According to respondents, fines for nonparticipation in communal labor range from Le 2,000 (\$0.67) to Le 12,000 (\$4) per individual and Le 50,000 (\$18.67) per chief, though the fines in the case below are a bit higher. At least one respondent said that they can be forgiven if the guilty person “begs.”

Communal Labor and a Road through the Bush

A great many of Sierra Leone’s communities are beyond the reach of a “motorable road,” even by the generous definition of “motorable” used in Sierra Leone, which typically includes steep paths that only the sturdiest 4x4s and most intrepid drivers can climb.

One such string of villages branches from the main (dirt) route some 15 miles from one of the country’s major provincial cities. To reach these communities requires hiking along a narrow “bush path” through dense vegetation, over makeshift bridges and around fallen trees. Periodically, the path crosses a sunlit, cleanly brushed dirt clearing with a handful of thatch-and-mud houses: a village.

Though not particularly remote by Sierra Leonean standards, these villages are cut off from key economic and social systems. People needing medical attention are carried by hammock along the miles of rough path to the main road, where they then wait for transport to town. In one group of communities visited by the J4P/LG team, the only development projects that had ever reached them were latrines and wells built by a local NGO. The materials for these projects were carried up the path “on the heads of our children,” according to one chief.

Realizing they needed a road to “bring development”—both better facilities and access to markets and social facilities—a group of nine villages along this route came together to build a road. The village chiefs initiated and agreed to the project, which had strong support in some but not all the villages, but it was the youths who were expected to do months of back-breaking physical labor to build the road.

On the day work was meant to begin, three of the villages—including the two closest to the existing road and thus with the least to gain from the project—did not show up. Infuriated, the local councilor sued them in the local court. His action seemed to many to be a bit extreme, and at least one elder from the other six villages tried to convince him to give the villages a warning first, but by then the court clerk had already written the summons. According to one community leader, a 70-year-old male village chief and development committee chairman, the paramount chief himself then refused to let them withdraw the case, saying that “if they don’t sue the people he will close the court.”

As a result, town chiefs and their deputies or other elders from the three villages were brought before the court, found guilty, and fined Le 200,000 (\$66.67) total (Le 80,000 for each of the two bigger villages and Le 40,000 for the third village). This was a significant amount of money for three very poor villages, and the chiefs begged for time to raise the funds. The court chairman wanted to lock them up until they were able to pay, but a paralegal working with a local NGO intervened and stood as surety. The chiefs returned to their villages to raise the money; by most accounts all adults, male and female, chipped in somewhere between Le 1,000 and Le 5,000 to pay the fine.

This tense start to the road project undermined morale, possibly dooming the project for good. As the elderly village chief (quoted above) said, “The men became unhappy... disenchanting. Even those from the other villages [the villages that did participate on the first day] sympathized with their fellow brothers. They were no longer enthusiastic as before.” This was particularly true once people realized that the money collected as a fine would remain with the court, rather than be reinvested in the road work; most had assumed they could use the money to purchase tools, provide food for the workers, or even compensate the workers for their time. Instead, the court kept the money and village residents were taxed to pay for tools.

The workers did turn up to work, because they were afraid they would be heavily fined otherwise, but were not eager to work hard. Some or all of the workers—and particularly those from the villages that were fined—began cutting corners and dragging their feet, going through the motions but without any real will or enthusiasm. “We started to participate in the work, though unwillingly, out of fear not to be fined again,” said one female youth leader (age 40). “We started to participate... but we were not happy,” said a 44-year-old male community member, “the work was therefore done slowly.” By some accounts, tensions emerged between those who wanted the road and were working hard and those who were more reluctant; one respondent reported that youths from one village threatened violence, saying that only if someone were killed would all work hard.

The labor was considered too physically demanding for women, though some did cook or clean for the men back in their villages. Men too old to work sometimes traveled to the work site to give the young men “moral support.” But the heavy work of cutting trees, pulling stumps, clearing bush and stones, and battering a dense jungle into a smooth and motorable road fell entirely on the shoulders of the younger men.

Some may have decided it was too much. Several respondents report that young men from some of the villages decided to leave the area to avoid the work; some went to mining areas, while two returned to their home village in another district. (Such accounts could well be rumors or exaggerations, as only one respondent was able to give specific details.)

Ultimately, the nine villages did manage to make substantial progress before finally concluding that they could go no further without outside help, including proper tools and expertise. Attempts to obtain such assistance through a local NGO, chieftom officials, the government’s National Commission for Social Action

(NaCSA), and an engineer from the Sierra Leone Roads Authority proved fruitless. Today the road is mostly overgrown and returned to bush, and their youths' work—and the conflict that accompanied it—seems to have been in vain.

There is some evidence that the sanctions in such situations are much less harsh than they were before the war. A Community Teacher Association (CTA) chairman from Bo district described this phenomenon in relation to a different sort of challenge: the use of communal resources (see boxed quote). Another respondent from the same chiefdom, a 26-year-old male village youth leader, agreed. “Before the war, heavy fines were levied on people that fail[ed] to participate in communal labor, up to the tune of about Le 25,000 (\$8.33)... The local court considered it a criminal offence and once you [were] reported by an authority... you [paid] the fine without argument. These high fines made several young people to flee the village and... the chiefdom in those days. But now it has changed, for although communal labor remains compulsory, the consequence for refusing to work is just about Le 2,000–3,000 (\$0.67–\$1) as a way of punishing people not to make it a habit.”

There are also signs that residents of rural Sierra Leone, particularly young people, are increasingly resistant to performing chiefdom labor, and increasingly willing to challenge authorities on the issue. (On the other hand, at least one author has noted that some former combatants have offered their labor on roads and other public goods to help win acceptance and reintegration.⁶⁶) J4P/LG researchers found cases in every research site in which people (especially youths) refused to provide work for a particular project or purpose, and thereby came into conflict with the authorities. Many respondents argued that such refusal would have been far less likely prior to the war, and researchers themselves—all but one of whom were born and raised in provincial towns—were surprised at the level of defiance seen. (It is also important to note, however, that the research team specifically sought and documented cases in which conflict had occurred; many other projects, perhaps the majority, proceed without any problem.) Other studies have also identified this trend. A series of consultations on chiefdom governance conducted in 1999–2001 found that chiefdom authorities “complained that local youths are no longer willing to work for the common good.”⁶⁷ A 2002 paper cites one respondent—a young, male CDF former combatant—as saying, “If you, as a bad chief, will send us anywhere to brush some land or do some other work, we will refuse.”⁶⁸ This suggests youths are using labor as a form of protest or political expression.

Why People Challenge Communal Labor

Interviews suggest that a few factors are particularly irksome to those asked to participate in communal labor, and are perhaps partly responsible for sparking the refusal to work. One is the perception that the chiefs' own children are not held to the same standards.⁶⁹ As a 42-year-old female youth leader from Bo district said, “Children belonging to chiefs do not work in this town but they want others to work.” In the Moyamba research site, 15 youths refused to help with road brushing (repair), in part because the court chairman's son and section chief's son did not participate; the youths were fined Le 5,000 each. In this and other communal labor cases in the chiefdom, some

Sanctions for Challenging Authorities

“The way of those who take decisions in this village has not changed, it is the people's reaction to those decisions...that has changed. Let me give you an example. The section chief and town chiefs have asked us to pay some money to purchase a goat for the [visit] of the vice president. [We asked ourselves:] where was that decision reached, and who took that decision? So we did not pay, and nothing happened to us. If it were before the war all of us would have been taken to the N.A. (local court) to face summons.”

- CTA chairman (male, 42 years), Bo district

youths alleged that chiefs penalize others for failing to participate but do not penalize their own children. (See box.)

Another factor is the perception that money was budgeted for paying laborers—particularly on infrastructure projects—and is being misused. As a 40-year-old male section chief from Bo district said, “When the chiefs are not transparent in using communal funds, youths do not participate in communal work, especially when they think that funds provided [are] for the communal work.” The 2004 World Bank social assessment also identifies this danger. “Young people continue to read community action as a form of coerced extraction of their labor,” the report says. “This reading is especially likely where it is thought that the village elite has appropriated financial resources provided for community development projects. The subsequent anger is highly destabilizing.”⁷⁰

This reaction seems particularly common in the case of externally funded development projects, whose price tags seem large to local people, and whose procedures can be complex and confusing. In such cases, people sometimes begin to question where all the money is going and whether some funds might have been included (or perhaps should have been included) to pay for their labor. This seems to be particularly common in the case of the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA)’s Community-Driven Program. Somewhat perversely, the greater transparency of that program—NaCSA officials inform community members in an open meeting about the value of the contract—seems to contribute to greater difficulty in mobilizing the community contribution, as people often feel the contract is too large not to include local labor and materials. Cross-comparisons are also important in these situations, with respondents pointing to similar projects in neighboring communities that (are rumored to) have paid laborers. The box below describes two cases of this sort.

Communal Labor Disputes in a Remote Moyamba Chiefdom

Communal labor is a common source of disputes between youths and elders in this chiefdom. Youths resist being required to provide labor while receiving no payment in return, while chiefs complain the youths are in the habit of disobeying chiefdom laws. In explaining their resistance, youths accuse chiefs of excluding them from decision making and of monopolizing benefits and revenue that flow to the chiefdom. As one respondent, a 42-year-old male member of the project management committee (PMC) for a local NaCSA-supported project, said, “the chiefs are unable to mobilize the people because the people see them as cheats... When incentives come for [communal] work... it is the chiefs and other leaders that squander it, so the youths say the chiefs should do the work.” For instance, one respondent alleged that the chiefdom received Le 11 million in microcredit but only Le 8 million was disbursed, and that many youths were left out of the scheme. Youths also complain that chiefs have not held their own children to the same work requirements; in one case, a town chief’s son failed to participate in road work but was not fined, so the other youths refused to provide any more labor on the road.

Two recent construction projects were delayed because the community failed to provide the required labor. In the first, community members from throughout the chiefdom were expected to provide free (unskilled) labor for the NaCSA-supported construction of a local (N.A.) court *barrie* (a public structure housing local court sittings as well as other community meetings). Like all community-driven NaCSA projects, the court *barrie* was selected in a participatory community meeting; however, many report that the court was the authorities’ preference, not that of other community members. More than one respondent said that those who voted for the court did so because it was what the chiefdom elders wanted. Others equated support for the court *barrie* to support for the chiefdom committee, which initiated the letter of interest to NaCSA requesting a court *barrie*. Several pointed out that the court *barrie* was a poor choice, given the small number of cases heard in the local court and the enormous other development needs. Objectively, the chiefdom is

one of the poorest in the district, with limited facilities and very poor quality roads, and the court barrie does not seem to be the greatest priority.

The community was informed in preliminary meetings with NaCSA that they would be required to provide unskilled labor and local materials free of charge, and those present at the meetings agreed. Later, however, the youths refused to provide the labor unless they were paid. By some accounts the contractor had initially been paying them (Le 2,500–Le 3,000 per day) and later stopped, which provoked the youths to stop working. Youths had also sometimes been paid for labor on other projects, which may have set a precedent difficult to change. Others pointed to the Le 131 million cost of the project, announced by NaCSA at a public meeting. “The community people... saw the money to be too much for the project and expected the contractor to pay them before participating,” said one 31-year-old male youth leader and PMC member. Rumors circulated that the contractor, a close relative of the paramount chief, had misappropriated funds.

The contractor and other authorities held many meetings to try to convince the youths to continue to work, but this proved futile. NaCSA refused to release the next tranche of funding to the contractor because the work under the first tranche had not been completed, and construction remained at a standstill. Eventually the district council chairman intervened and convinced NaCSA to release the rest of the funds to the contractor, and the contractor paid some of the youths to provide the necessary labor. The court barrie was finally completed in 2007.

In the second case, an international NGO sponsored construction of a new primary school, one of 12 in the chiefdom. They too required a community contribution in the form of fetching water and gathering stones and sand. None of the community’s adults were willing to provide this assistance, so the school children were taken out of class and forced to do the work. When a pastor from the school’s sponsoring mission visited the community to urge people to provide the required labor, very few attended the meeting. Those who did pointed to precedent: they had not provided labor when a previous school was constructed, sponsored by a different mission, so they would not do so for this school.

A third factor, not mentioned explicitly in interviews but suggested by some of the cases, is that people are more likely to refuse to provide labor when they do not see the project to be in their own interest. Thus, in the road project described earlier (in the box entitled *Communal Labor and a Road through the Bush*), it is the three villages with the least to gain from a new road—the two closest to the existing road, and a third that would not be reached by the new road—who failed to participate in the first day of work. In the case of the court barrie in Moyamba district (in the box *Communal Labor Disputes in a Remote Moyamba Chiefdom*), many respondents said the community people did not themselves want the court barrie but supported it because the chiefs and other authorities wanted it. This lack of enthusiasm may be behind the refusal of chiefdom youths to provide free labor, thereby delaying the construction for years.

More generally, the cases reveal an underlying frustration among some young people—also evident in unrelated interviews—and a resentment that youths carry the burden of hard work for projects of sometimes dubious public benefit.

Finally, the J4P/LG research reveals that the act of challenging authorities may in turn have an impact on how decisions are made at a community level, perhaps especially, decisions about communal labor. For instance, a 37-year-old man in a Bo district chiefdom—a chiefdom which has experienced conflict over communal labor on several occasions, including the road and market cases described above—gave the following account of how decisions are made regarding communal labor:

Before the war, community labor was done by force in the sense that the chiefs and other authorities just meet and take a decision that a particular community work is to be done on a set date and time and tell the town crier to announce and everybody is expected to cooperate or face serious punishment in the form of a fine. But after the war, things have changed, for the chiefs can no longer impose on people about a particular community work. Now they will call a meeting at the court barrie and people will discuss on a particular proposal made by the chiefs for community work and a final decision will be taken mostly by consensus. But after such a decision has been reached, defaulters are fined heavily.

(The mention of heavy fines for defaulting on a decision taken “by consensus” suggests that there may be higher sanctions for a project decided in this way or otherwise considered a community priority.) Another respondent from the same village agreed, while a respondent from another chiefdom reported decisions on communal labor being made collectively, but at the village level. In that village, no one could recall a time when people refused to work after the project was decided.

Still, there is far from free reign to challenge the chiefs and other authorities. As one 25-year-old male community member from a remote Moyamba chiefdom said, “If you challenge the chiefs you always get the blame as they will say you are a small boy.”

Reasons for Change: From Experiences During War to Discourses of Human Rights

Respondents offer a number of explanations for why the relations between youths and elders are changing in the ways outlined above. They also explain why youths are perceived more positively than they were before the war, why they are more likely to hold positions of authority, why they are more likely to be consulted or included in community decision making, and why they are willing to assert themselves more strongly and challenge authorities over such issues as communal labor and the use of resources. Some of these explanations are echoed in research and analysis by other authors.

It seems clear from the J4P/LG research, as well as work by other authors, that Sierra Leone’s recent civil war might itself have been one of the greatest causes of these shifting norms and relationships. The widespread displacement and population mobility of the decade-long period of the war—more than 2 million people, half of the country’s population, were forced to flee their homes during the conflict, most to other parts of Sierra Leone but some to neighboring countries—exposed residents of rural Sierra Leone to new places and ideas. Most of these individuals would otherwise have spent their entire lives in the same chiefdom, and often in the same village, with little chance to question how their chiefs and other authorities governed their communities. Instead, people were exposed to alternative norms in other chiefdoms or in the urban areas to which many were displaced. Those in refugee camps could also trade information and ideas.⁷¹

Many people also argue that the war “emboldened” people—perhaps particularly but not solely former combatants—to be willing to stand up to authorities. As one 65-year-old community member from Bombali district said, the war “made people brave... embolden[ed] people to resist what they think is not good for them.” The 2004 World Bank social assessment estimates that as many as 50 percent of “ordinary rural males” in certain parts of the country participated directly in fighting the war, and argues that the reintegration of former combatants helped drive the

questioning of deferential attitudes and the increasing willingness to challenge authority. “Wars change social attitudes, not least among combatants,” the authors argue.⁷² A specific case is the large numbers of young men who were mobilized as part of the community defense forces (CDF). The CDF often established local authority apart from chiefs, many of whom fled and others of whom were not members of the CDF. Some have argued that because of this experience, and even after the postwar return of chiefs and other local authorities, the CDF retained a degree of autonomous power. A study in the immediate postwar period found that “a significant number of paramount chiefs now feel vulnerable to the youth CDF fighters detailed to defend them.”⁷³ More recently, the World Bank social assessment found that “post-war, sections of the CDF, marginalized in the peace and demobilization process, are as loud in criticizing rural gerontocracy as the RUF.”⁷⁴

On the other hand, many argue that the experience of war affected chiefs and other authorities, causing them to rethink how they govern and particularly how they engage with youths. Chiefs and other elites were singled out for especially brutal treatment by the rebel RUF and other fighting forces, and there is evidence that some are treading more lightly now as a consequence, lest they suffer again in another outbreak of violence.

When people offer explanations for why youths and others are more assertive in the postwar period, perhaps the most striking factor is the prevalence of a rights-based discourse. This was heard frequently in the J4P/LG research. “There is more challenge to authority now than before the war because we are a bit sensitized about our rights,” said one 30-year-old male community member from Moyamba district. “Before the war, chiefs were very powerful and could not be challenged,” said a 50-year-old male village development committee chairman from Bombali district, “[but] now people know their rights.” And a deputy village chief (male, age 50) from Moyamba district said, “After the war a lot of youths are challenging authority because they say there [are] human right[s] and they have been sensitized by the impact of the war.”

What leads rural, often uneducated community members to use the language of international human rights? This is debatable. A 2002 article by Archibald and Richards explored this human rights discourse, and argued that it comes not (or not merely) from the imposition of externally defined values, but emerges through a local debate spurred by war-induced social transformation.⁷⁵ For their part, respondents attributed their awareness of rights in part to “sensitizations” (trainings) by NGOs and to radio programming, as well as to greater exposure to “outside influence” and “mov[ing] from this town.” At least two commented on the impact of the war itself, which exposed them to new places and new ideas. Others said the chiefs had been “sensitized” by NGOs, which made them less likely to behave abusively—and made it easier for people to challenge them when they did. “Before the war the chiefs had too much power but now they still have the power but with justice,” said one respondent. The same person argued that workshops conducted by a local justice NGO “tell chiefs how to treat us and tell us how to behave to chiefs.” Moreover, “when you have a problem and someone wants to take advantage [of] you, [the NGO] will intervene.”

Those Left Behind: Who Doesn’t Benefit From Changing Norms?

Not all youths benefit equally from these trends toward an increasing ability to speak and participate. As mentioned earlier, it seems likely that youth leadership positions are dominated by youthful members of local elites. More specifically, there are several groups of youths who seem to be largely excluded from the benefits of changing norms.

The first excluded group is the youngest youths. As discussed at the beginning of this paper, there is a strong dominance in rural Sierra Leone of “elders among youths.” Positions of authority are held almost exclusively by those at the top limits of—or well outside—the official youth age range, and other forms of participation and inclusion are similarly dominated by these older youths. Young men and women in their teens and twenties therefore remain largely excluded from power and decision making. Though this is true in many (if not most) societies, it is perhaps particularly so—and particularly troubling, given the demographics of past and possible future fighting forces—in Sierra Leone.

A second group is female youths. Men of all ages tend to take a larger role in local governance and justice than do women, and this is equally true for youths. In fact, the term youth is sometimes understood in a specifically gendered way, and a single youth representative is much more likely to be male than female (though there are exceptions). Moreover, the new horizontal associations, such as the bike riders’ associations, tend to be solely or predominantly male. In this context, it seems unlikely that the viewpoints of female youths are being fully represented. What is not clear, and may be a worthwhile area for further research, is why female youths are being excluded, and particularly to what degree this is the result of gender norms or other factors such as education level, home and work burdens, and so forth.

A third group is that of “strangers”—migrants and ethnic minorities—and other people from weak lineages. It seems likely that youths from these populations are further disadvantaged. As one male respondent in a remote Moyamba chiefdom (age not recorded) said, his youth and stranger status combined to prevent him from challenging an authority figure. “I cannot condemn the youth leader because I am a stranger and a small boy,” he said.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The J4P/LG research findings suggest that youths are somewhat more able now than before the war to engage actively in governance and decision-making processes in their communities. Inclusion and participation of youths in community governance have increased, though decision making remains primarily in the hands of local elders. Notably, youths are more willing to challenge authorities, particularly over communal labor. They have also carved out some new social and political spaces in which they can enjoy a measure of self-governance and a greater voice in the larger social dialogue.

The marginalization of youths has been identified as one of the likely causes, or at least driving forces, of the recent civil war. As a result, the TRC and others have argued for more inclusive forms of governance, as well as avenues for youths to express themselves and realize their potential. In that vein, the changes we identify are positive. On the other hand, youths are still largely frustrated by both the lack of economic and social opportunities and the enduring power of traditional elites. Such frustration, combined with the increasing willingness of youths to challenge authority, could prove dangerous if acted out in destructive rather than constructive ways.

The key to avoiding that is to allow youths—along with other marginalized members of society, such as women, strangers, and members of weak lineages—access to open, productive, and meaningful avenues for asserting points of view and airing grievances. They should feel a stake in their communities and in the larger society, and a role (and responsibility) in helping to govern and

improve their country. As the authors of a 2003 paper examining a number of recent conflicts in Africa conclude, “The antidote to anti-social violence is to involve young people in the making of society.”⁷⁶

For those individuals and institutions wishing to support a more inclusive and satisfying world for youths in Sierra Leone, this research yields a number of lessons. These recommendations are a product of the J4P/LG team’s own reflections, modified through discussions with partners in Sierra Leone and elsewhere.

The Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) should:

- **Support reform of chiefdom governance.** Traditional justice and governance can, and to some extent have, become more inclusive and responsive to the needs of youth. The reform and democratization of chiefdom governance structures is one important avenue for achieving this change. The GoSL has an essential role to play in such reform, particularly through the revision of legislation and other policies governing the chieftaincy system.

Possible reforms include:

- o Expand franchise for chieftaincy elections (eliminate or expand the “electoral college” of chiefdom councilors).
 - o Mandate specific leadership positions for youth, and increase (or mandate) youth representation among such groups as local court members, town and section chiefs, and chiefdom councilors. (This could also apply to women, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized groups.)
 - o Enact the 2006 local courts act drafted by the Law Reform Commission. This act would reform local courts to increase the independence of local court chairmen, bring the courts under the supervision of the judiciary, and clarify the regulations governing which cases courts can hear and under what conditions.
 - o Require greater transparency and more inclusive processes for chiefdom decision making, particularly around the use of communal resources. Specific processes should be developed locally through a national dialogue that includes chiefdom authorities as well as youth, women, and other civil society representatives.
- **Enforce national age limits for youth.** This is particularly important as part of the establishment of a more formalized system of chiefdom, district, regional and national youth commissions, and in terms of access to benefits meant to target youths. Though assessing someone’s age is often a very inexact science in Sierra Leone, it is clear to everyone that many people claiming to be youths and youth leaders are well above the legal age limit.
 - **Consider encouraging a new, graduated power structure.**⁷⁷ To help encourage people in their thirties and forties to step down from youth leadership positions, the government could consider introducing an intermediate category—such as “junior elders”—to give an alternative space for such individuals to engage in public debate and decision making. This would open up youth leadership positions to younger individuals, while assuaging the concern of elders hesitant to yield real decision-making power to the large and growing population under the age of 30. Of course, this will work only if there is support for the idea among Sierra Leonean communities and civil society.

- **Reconsider the use of free labor as “community contributions” to development projects.** Labor requirements fall disproportionately on the young, particularly young men, and evoke memories of abusive practices in the past. Alternative contributions can meet the demand for community investment without burdening young men and exacerbating tensions between youths and elders. Such alternatives do have their own downsides, however, and many people disagree with a move to paid labor. Given the level of generational tension around the provision of communal labor, however, it seems worthwhile to at least discuss alternative arrangements, which might include:
 - monetary or in-kind contributions that can be assessed equally (or progressively) among all community members;
 - food-for-work programs, in which young laborers are given food while they work on the project. All community members can be required to contribute rice to feed the laborers, or food can be funded by development partners or the government.
- **Support interest-based associations and other new, youth-led social and political spaces.** By representing the collective interests of a larger number of youths, these groups can be more successful in engaging with state and traditional authorities. Such groups can also allow youths to achieve a measure of self-governance and self-reliance, and can help them develop skills in leadership, consultation, management, and conflict resolution that will enable them to engage more effectively and responsibly in the public sphere.
- **Lead a national dialogue on the role of youths in public life.** Perhaps the most important role the GoSL can play is as a leader in the normative change needed to help all Sierra Leoneans view youths as an important group of citizens with a right to participate in the governance of their communities, chiefdoms, and society.

Civil society organizations should:

- **Continue to engage with traditional authorities around issues of youth inclusion and human rights.** Efforts to “sensitize” traditional leaders seem to bear some fruit, particularly when the message emphasizes the interests of those traditional leaders.
- **Engage with all community members about the meaning of consultative governance.** Elders and youths alike must understand consultation as a substantive dialogue in which all parties can express ideas and opinions and have those taken into account, rather than as a process of informing youths about a decision already made.
- **Frame arguments to local authorities in terms of their own interest.** Including youths can have a number of positive benefits for elders and other community leaders. Youths will be more willing to contribute to and cooperate with development projects and other community activities if they are included in decision making. They also may be less critical of and angry with authorities if they feel their voices are being heard. Finally, authorities are sensitive to the historical lesson that youth exclusion helped drive the last war, and that including youths might avoid a return to war.
- **Distinguish between superficial participation and true inclusion when assessing progress in youth empowerment.** There is a great risk that youth inclusion will achieve only the façade of participation, in which youth representatives are present but their views are ignored. When assessing success, civil society groups must be wary of this type of

superficial change. As evidence shows, the existence of a youth leader or the use of broad community meetings is often insufficient, as youths may not feel free to challenge local elders and elites, who then continue to dominate decision making.

- **Consider engaging separately with constituent groups within a community.** Experience from community-driven development and other facilitated consultation techniques have found that breaking groups down along lines of age, gender, or other meaningful distinctions, and allowing separate discussions by each small group to precede a broader community-level discussion, can help ensure that the viewpoints of marginalized groups are heard.
- **Pay attention to who is included and excluded within the broader group of “youths.”** Among the groups often excluded are younger youths in their teens and twenties, migrants or those considered “strangers,” those from weaker lineages, and female youths. Organizations encouraging or requiring youth participation should always monitor the representation of these different populations of youths, and should take steps to ensure more equal involvement.

Development partners should:

- **Support the GoSL and civil society in the tasks outlined above.**
- **Reconsider the use of free labor in projects they support.** Like the GoSL (see above), development partners should consider the use of alternative arrangements—such as food-for-work or the collection of monetary or in-kind contributions from all community members—that will meet the demand for community investment without burdening young men and exacerbating tensions between youths and elders.
- **Develop techniques for increasing youth participation locally, rather than importing ideas wholesale from elsewhere.** In particular, development partners must draw on the expertise of people with a deep understanding of the cultural and social context, including the experience of the war, and must tailor initiatives accordingly.
- **Distinguish between superficial participation and true inclusion when assessing progress in youth empowerment.** When assessing success in the area of youth inclusion, development partners must look beyond the façade of superficial participation—such as the existence of a youth leader or the use of broad community meetings—to the less visible but more important question of whether youths are genuinely involved and invested in community governance. An understanding of these underlying dynamics will likely require investment in in-depth, qualitative research, preferably involving Sierra Leonean researchers.

In addition, for researchers and institutions that sponsor research, there are a number of areas that would merit further investigation.

Researchers should:

- **Investigate changes in youth-elder relationships in the areas of land use, economic activity, and social institutions.** This paper and the research on which it is based have focused on generational dynamics in relation to political institutions. Further research on how youths and nonyouths interact in other spheres, and how those interactions have

changed and are changing over time, could be informative. In particular, research into the control and use of land—an area of immense importance to Sierra Leone’s predominantly agricultural society, and one typically tied to gerontocratic power—would be both worthwhile and potentially instructive for policy.

- **Explore the extent and nature of youth involvement and decision-making power in secret societies.** Sodalities, generally known as secret societies, are sacred social groups with a long history in Sierra Leone. They have traditionally served an important role in organizing collective action and enforcing social norms.⁷⁸ Secret societies remain extremely common in Sierra Leone,⁷⁹ but there is some evidence they may be declining in prominence and importance.⁸⁰ The J4P/LG research team did not focus on secret societies, and this would be a rich area for future research. Areas that merit exploration include changes in how young people view secret societies; how many are initiated into societies and how involved they are in society activities; and how youths interact with elders within the societies. Researchers could also study changes in the role of societies in regulating behavior and organizing collective action.
- **Investigate which groups do and do not have access to youth leadership positions and why.** There is need for a nuanced analysis of whether youth leadership positions are dominated by local elites, and which groups are underrepresented among the leadership. Such a study should take a broad understanding of “elite,” grounded not only on obvious factors such as poverty and lineage, but also on the nuances of local power dynamics. It should also explore the mechanisms by which specific groups—such as women or strangers—are excluded from power.
- **Explore the role of political parties in explaining and influencing youth voice and participation.** Political division is an important factor underlying power structures in Sierra Leone, and one not addressed explicitly by the J4P/LG research team.

Appendix A – Research Questions

As outlined in its concept note,⁸¹ the J4P/LG project set out to answer a long list of research questions:

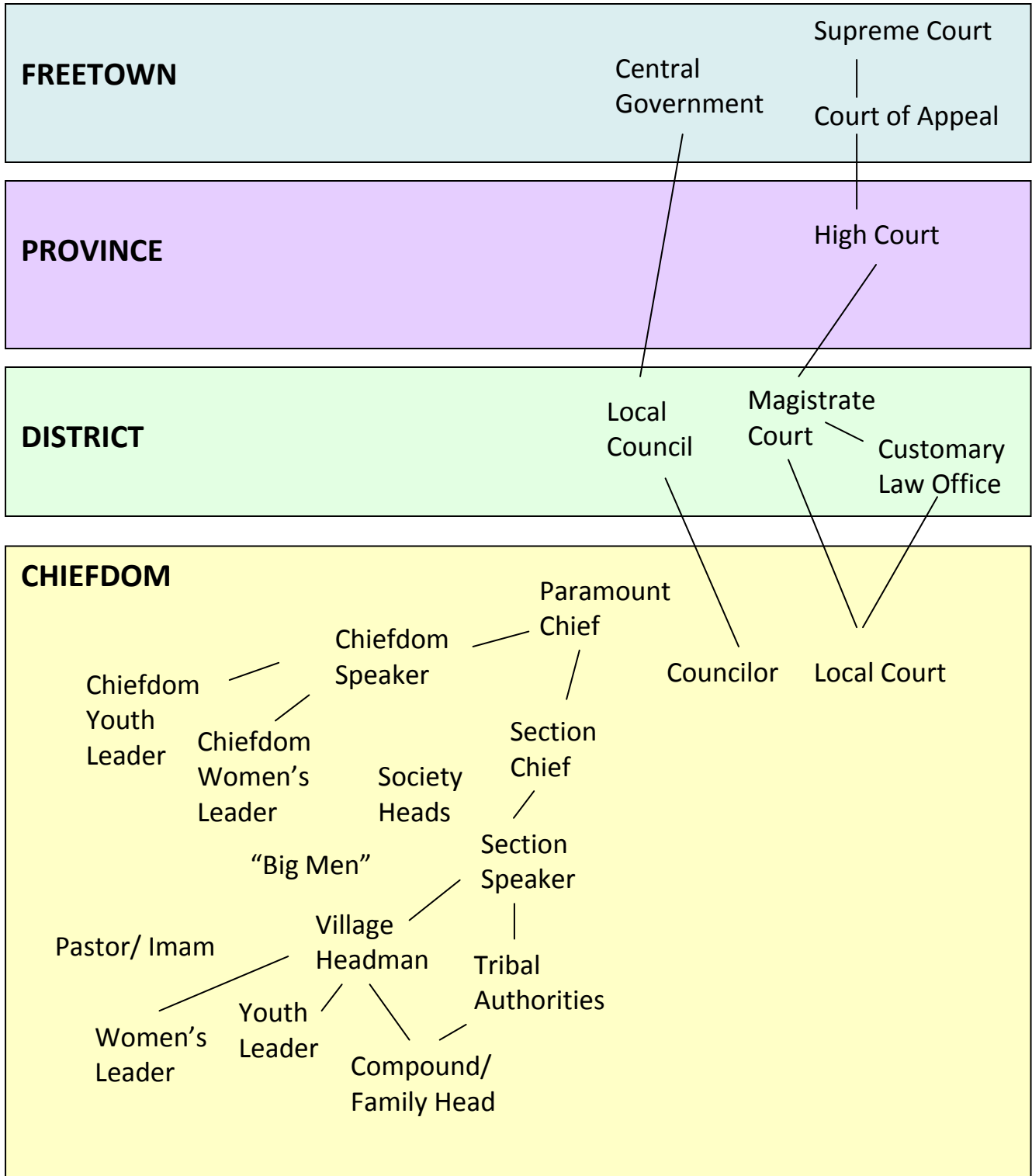
1. Who are the main authorities or power holders in the communities? Where do they derive their authority and legitimacy?
2. What are the prevailing social norms and governance rules regarding how collective decisions are made, how public resources are mobilized and utilized, and how authority is exercised? Do different groups have noticeably different attitudes towards, and perception of, authorities, and different degrees of participation in collective action?
3. What kinds of systems and mechanisms are utilized to resolve and manage grievances and to lodge claims against state or nonstate authorities, and why? Are certain groups or communities more likely to pursue justice? If so, why?
4. What trajectories do the grievances follow, and why? What are the outcomes of these processes, and what factors influence the results?
5. How do the mechanisms employed, the trajectories, and the outcomes differ with respect to:
 - a. the characteristics of individuals and communities involved (and why)?
 - b. the characteristics of particular grievances (and why)?
6. What barriers to effective justice and governance exist, and which individuals, groups, and communities are most affected? How are these barriers overcome, or how could they be overcome? Which groups have a vested interest in maintaining the barriers?
7. How are the answers to all of these questions changing over time? How and why does local-level justice and governance improve or deteriorate?
8. What is the impact of external justice and governance interventions? Do they affect people's attitudes towards authorities, their participation in public affairs, and their perception of influence? Do they trigger change in what people demand and obtain in relation to justice and governance? Do they result in more just outcomes? Are their effects sustainable beyond the end of the intervention?

To that end, the planned qualitative research would both “map local power structures and sources of authority and legitimacy” and “track how people attempt to resolve disputes or claims.” The concept note proposed two categories of grievances on which research would focus: first, grievances involving land and natural resources and second, grievances involving local authorities (including claims either to or against local authorities, broadly defined).

As research and training progressed, however, it became clear that this research agenda was overly ambitious given the time and capacity constraints. The team therefore focused on the second category of grievances—those involving local authorities—and narrowed the research questions somewhat. In particular, question 8 was addressed only superficially, and several other questions were addressed only in part. Future research, whether by The World Bank or others, could usefully follow up on those areas not covered exhaustively in this project.

Appendix B – Local Governance Structures in Sierra Leone

“*INFORMAL*” ←————→ “*FORMAL*”



Appendix C – Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

¹ For more information about local governance in Sierra Leone, see other *Justice for the Poor* papers available at <http://www.worldbank.org/justiceforthe poor>, including R. Manning, “How ‘Traditional’ and ‘Modern’ Justice and Governance Systems Interact in Rural and Peri-Urban Sierra Leone,” (Washington, DC: World Bank, Forthcoming).

² The term “stranger” in Sierra Leone is used to refer not only to recent migrants but also to those whose ethnic identity differs from that of the local area’s original inhabitants, known as “indigenes.” Stranger status can persist for generations, and often (though not always) correlates with social, political, and economic marginalization, including limited access to land and marriage. This marginalization is discussed in greater detail in P. Richards et al., “Social Capital and Survival: Prospects for Community-Driven Development in Post-conflict Sierra Leone,” *Social Development Papers* 12 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2004). As they say, “the rural community is typically divided between leading lineages and the rest, and that the most severe poverty and vulnerability is mainly found among strangers and members of weaker lineages” (iii).

³ For example, see Sierra Leone, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 2004), <http://trcsierraleone.org/drwebsite/publish/index.shtml>. In its “Findings in Respect of Youth,” the report states that “the political exclusion of the youth prompted some of them to assert themselves forcefully into the political process” (vol. 2, chap. 2, 94.) Elsewhere the report finds that “many young men joined the RUF voluntarily because they were disaffected. This trend demonstrates the centrality of bad governance, corruption, all forms of discrimination and the marginalization of certain sectors of society among the causes of conflict” (vol. 2, chap. 2, 43). Many other authors have made similar points. As one example, see Richards et al., “Social Capital and Survival.” In that paper, the authors argue that “by and large the root causes of the war of 1991 ... lie to a great extent in the poverty and instability of large numbers of rural young people ‘spun off’ from village society because of control exercised by village elders over land and marriage” (i). This analysis is not universally accepted, and a number of observers have disagreed.

⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone, vol. 2, chap. 3, 167.

⁵ “Timap” is a Krio word meaning “stand up.” Timap for Justice is a local organization providing community-based paralegal services in a number of chiefdoms in Sierra Leone. Timap receives funding from the World Bank-administered Japanese Social Development Fund (JSDF), and also partnered with *Justice for the Poor* on research and evaluation.

⁶ Sierra Leone is divided into a number of administrative units at different levels. Provinces (of which there are three, plus the Western Area which includes the capital Freetown) are the largest. These are subdivided into 12 districts, plus the Western Area, which are in turn divided into 149 chiefdoms, each ruled by a single paramount chief. Chiefdoms are further divided into sections, each led by a section chief. Villages and towns are the final, and smallest, administrative unit.

⁷ UN (United Nations), “Frequently Asked Questions,” Youth at the United Nations, New York. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/qanda.htm>.

⁸ World Bank, “Improving Opportunities for Sustainable Youth Employment in Sierra Leone” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2008): 7-8.

⁹ As a 2002 study of popular discourse on human rights in Sierra Leone noted, youth “involves social status as well as age, as opposed to ‘big person’... a person with power, wealth, or status.” S. Archibald and P. Richards, “Converts to Human Rights? Popular Debate about War and Justice in Rural Central Sierra Leone,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 72: 3 (2002): 345.

¹⁰ ENCISS is a DfID-supported project in Sierra Leone. The full name is Enhancing Interaction and Interface Between Civil Society and the State to Improve Poor People’s Lives.

¹¹ World Bank and ENCISS, “Consultations with Youth in Sierra Leone” (Washington: World Bank, forthcoming), 2. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2007/Resources/1489782-1137012196309/2112807-1150737906527/Draft_Consultations_with_youth_in_Sierra_Leone.pdf.

¹² *Ibid.*, sec. 2.4.

¹³ K. Peters et al., “What Happens to Youth During and After Wars?” RAWOO Working Paper (RAWOO: The Hague, October 2003): 30, <http://www.rawoo.nl/pdf/youthreport.pdf>.

¹⁴ Life expectancy in Sierra Leone in 2006 was just 39 years for men and 42 years for women. “Sierra Leone,” World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/countries/sle/en/>.

¹⁵ Thanks to Archibald and Richards for this “greed versus grievance” framework.

¹⁶ For an explanation of the lineage and marriages systems and their consequences for young people, see Richards et al., “Social Capital and Survival,” 3-7.

¹⁷ Archibald and Richards, among other authors, document many examples of this.

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- ¹⁸ Archibald and Richards, “Converts to Human Rights,” 349.
- ¹⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone, vol. 2, chap. 2, 43.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 36
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 94.
- ²² *Ibid.*, chap. 3, 37.
- ²³ *Improving Opportunities for Sustainable Youth Employment*, 11-12.
- ²⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone, vol. 2, chap. 3, 167.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.
- ²⁶ Peters et al., “What Happens to Youth,” 19.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ²⁸ Archibald and Richards, “Converts to Human Rights,” 345.
- ²⁹ For a more general discussion of local governance systems in rural and peri-urban Sierra Leone, see the forthcoming paper by this author, “How ‘Traditional’ and ‘Modern’ Justice and Governance Systems Interact in Sierra Leone.”
- ³⁰ At a discussion meeting about this and other J4P/LG papers, some government and civil society representatives in Sierra Leone argued that the bulk of changes highlighted in the paper can be attributed to a weakening of elders and traditional authorities, rather than a strengthening of youths.
- ³¹ This was a common practice in prewar politics, and for many people in Sierra Leone, it is a primary association with the word “youth.” It is not entirely clear whether the participants in such groups were actually youths in the sense of an age-defined category.
- ³² Unfortunately, the case does not have a happy ending from the community’s perspective. According to community members and police officers, a senior government official intervened on the man’s behalf, and though both the community and police said the man was charged in magistrate court and found guilty, the community members were not present at the hearing and there is no court record of the case. The community received no reimbursement or other compensation. For more details on this case and other cases of fraudulent development practitioners operating in postwar Sierra Leone, see the forthcoming paper by this author, “Exploitation of Poor Communities: False Promises in Reconstruction and Development,” (Washington, DC: World Bank), to be available at <http://www.worldbank.org/justiceforthe poor>.
- ³³ The Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP)-led government in power from 2002–2007.
- ³⁴ The All People’s Congress (APC) government, which took power in late 2007.
- ³⁵ Sometimes there are distinct male and female youth leaders, but usually both are represented by the same (typically male) individual.
- ³⁶ This was the perspective of several participants in a discussion meeting about this paper, held October 28, 2008. (See Appendix C for details.)
- ³⁷ Local courts, also known as native administration (NA) courts, are the lowest level of the formally recognized justice system, with typically one or two courts per chiefdom (though numbers vary). Courts are run by a Local Court Chairman, who commonly hears cases alongside a group of court members—typically three to five—who are usually male elders. The administration of local courts is governed by the Local Courts Act of 1963, which also outlines jurisdictional limits and an appeal process leading in principle through the court system up to the Supreme Court, though such appeals are extremely rare. Substantively, the courts hear cases on the basis of customary law, which is unwritten and varies from chiefdom to chiefdom. For more information, see B. Koroma, “Local Courts Record Analysis Survey in Sierra Leone” (Freetown: Justice Sector Development Programme (JSDP), October 2007), and the forthcoming paper by this author, “Dynamics of Change.”
- ³⁸ The winner was from a “stranger” ethnic group, one not traditionally native to that area though now in the majority. The loser was from the “indigene” ethnic group, those believed to have first settled the area and thereby traditionally given the right to rule that area.
- ³⁹ The J4P/LG research team did not directly test this hypothesis, which was raised by peer reviewer Pia Peeters, but the author considers it plausible.
- ⁴⁰ Motorbike taxis, known locally as *okadas*, are common in both rural and urban Sierra Leone. The organized drivers’ associations, however, are more common in urban areas, particularly the large provincial towns of Bo, Kenema, and Makeni.
- ⁴¹ Several authors have explored the bike riders’ associations. See, for example, Mohamed Gibril Sesay, “Bike Riders in Sierra Leone: A Case Study of Search for Common Ground’s Intervention” (Washington, DC, Search for Common Ground, March 2006); and Richards et al., “Social Capital and Survival,” 35-36.
- ⁴² Sesay, “Bike Riders in Sierra Leone,” 12.
- ⁴³ The J4P research team encountered many such groups, but they are also referenced by other authors, including Richards et al., “Social Capital and Survival,” 35.

⁴⁴ “Consultations with Youth in Sierra Leone.”

⁴⁵ The author wishes to thank Ambrose James, Director, Search for Common Ground – Sierra Leone, for raising community radio as another area of postwar youth influence and voice. Discussion meeting on draft J4P/LG publications, October 28, 2008. (See Appendix C for details.)

⁴⁶ David Tam-Baryoh, “African Media Development Initiative: Sierra Leone” (London: BBC World Service Trust, 2006), 16. The statistics cited here count the UN Radio station among domestic radio stations. This number may have increased since 2005.

⁴⁷ Ambrose James, discussion meeting, October 28, 2008.

⁴⁸ For more information on patterns of radio usage across Sierra Leone, see “Media Use, and Attitudes Towards Media, in Sierra Leone” (London: BBC World Service, June 2007), http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/pdf/media_report_2007.pdf.

⁴⁹ Inclusion in this group is not only limited by age and gender. Criteria such as tribe, lineage, wealth, education, perceived leadership qualities, and various methods of selection—including democratic election—also help determine who belongs among the core group of authorities.

⁵⁰ A note on the use of quotations from respondent interviews: Although presented for simplicity as quotations, most actually paraphrase the respondent’s original comments into English, based on researchers’ field notes. Quotations captured verbatim will usually also be reported in the original language spoken (often in a footnote). If the original language was English, this may be less clear, but this is a minor point, as relatively few interviews were conducted in English.

⁵¹ The survey found that males and nonyouth (defined as older than 35 years) were significantly more likely to attend meetings than women and youths, and were significantly more likely to have made comments at the last meeting they attended. Overall, 33 percent of all respondents, and 43 percent of respondents living in villages, said they had attended a community meeting in the past month. Of those who attended meetings, 57 percent said they had made comments at the last meeting they had attended, and men and the oldest group of respondents were the most likely to have made comments. In addition to age and gender, various measures of social status helped determine likelihood to attend meetings and to speak at those meetings. As the report states, “Respondents from ruling families or households in which someone held a leadership position were significantly more likely to attend, and migrants were significantly less likely to attend.... Those of higher economic and social status were more likely to make comments.” IRCBP, *Report on the IRCBP 2007 National Public Services Survey* (Freetown: IRCBP, May 2008), 42.

⁵² “Before the war, there was no inclusion in community level decision making. Chiefs and elders [would] just meet and take a decision and communicate it to the rest. But now that is not the case... When there is anything that has to do with the general interest of the village, the town chief will summon a general meeting where we go and discuss openly and sometimes where there is a stalemate we vote and the decision of the majority will be adopted.”

⁵³ The respondent also said that days for road brushing or bridge construction were decided collectively in open meetings, a stark change from before the war.

⁵⁴ A similar sentiment was expressed in the chiefdom governance consultations conducted in 1999–2001, in which youths in one workshop said “they are only considered as part of the chiefdom when it is time for communal labor.” R. Fanthorpe, *Chiefdom Governance Reform Programme Public Workshops: An Analysis of Facilitator’s Reports* (London, Department for International Development, 2004), 21–22.

⁵⁵ In Krio, he said “Enyting wae concern moni affairs, den no dae involve wi.”

⁵⁶ Similarly, a woman in one small village in the same chiefdom said the division chief collected tax but did not himself know how the tax was spent. He was simply following instructions from the chiefdom headquarter.

⁵⁷ Richards et al., “Social Capital and Survival,” 1.

⁵⁸ This probably varies dramatically from one part of the country to another, particularly in more remote areas where chiefs tend to have a stronger hold, but it held true for all main provincial (non-Western Area) research sites included in this work. The Western Area Rural District site is a slightly different case, and it is less clear how much has changed since before the war. There is no chieftaincy in the Western Area, and the present-day authorities (particularly the town headman and councilor) do not hold the same type or degree of authority as do most chiefs. They tolerate a high degree of dissent, and engage in relatively participatory decision making. It is unknown, however, whether this is a new phenomenon or a longstanding situation based on the area’s unique governance structure.

⁵⁹ Richards et al., “Social Capital and Survival,” 36. The authors also said that “Deferential attitudes have been brought into question by the war,” (36) and “The leader of the village young men’s association is now more apt to speak out,” especially in areas where the young men remained (at that point) mobilized as CDF (42). That report also argues that women are “more vocal than before the war,” citing as evidence the chiefdom consultation documents, which they say “reveal women complaining about their lack of involvement in selecting chiefs, or about local officials who control and divert project benefits intended for women.” Richards et al., “Social Capital and Survival,” 42.

⁶⁰ “The expectations of youth... are changing and they are more likely to challenge customary authority or simply exit the system of rural governance by migrating to Freetown or the mining areas.” Taylor Brown et al., “Sierra Leone Drivers of Change” (Bristol, UK: the IDL group, March 2008), 8-9.

⁶¹ J4P/LG researchers heard many allegations of corruption and misuse of funds among chiefdom authorities and others in a position to control resources. Cases ranged from small amounts of money (proceeds of a fundraising disco organized by the youths of one chiefdom and allegedly misappropriated by the youth leader) to potentially large amounts (chiefdom mining revenue delivered to a paramount chief of another chiefdom and possibly held for private gain). In some cases, the theft was in plain view, as with a tractor given to a chiefdom by a Ministry of Agriculture program for collective use, but being used only by the paramount chief and court chairman. At times the corruption seems accepted or even directed by a higher authority, as in the case of the government’s NASSIT social security payments for elderly people, which many people alleged had been misdirected and used for political patronage. (NASSIT was to give Le 200,000 per person to all elderly people in Sierra Leone. However, as respondents reported in one northern province chiefdom, “Those who were supposed to benefit do not benefit. The wrong people were given the money.” Another respondent agreed. “People came from all over the chiefdom to register but those I saw benefiting were not old people... A lot of people went home crying.” In an election year and in a very politically divided chiefdom, some alleged that the money was given to supporters of the ruling SLPP party, though it is difficult to know if this is true or if the suspicions and rumors were themselves politically motivated. In any case, respondents reported that higher (provincial-level) politicians were present for the NASSIT distribution, suggesting that they were at least aware of any misuse that occurred.) In all these cases and probably the vast majority of corruption cases in Sierra Leone, people did nothing.

⁶² As one youth leader said, “If you ask questions about projects, they will report you... that you don’t want development in your chiefdom.” An example is a NaCSA-supported project in the Western Area Rural District. Multiple respondents said that when community members raised questions about the project—including its size and price tag—NaCSA officials threatened to take the project elsewhere if the community were not “ready.”

⁶³ Richards et al., “Social Capital and Survival,” 14.

⁶⁴ As one 25-year-old male community member from Moyamba district said, “Pressure to work for the paramount chief comes from the section chief and town chief who want to exercise power (power drunkenness) by forcing / punishing people for failing to participate.”

⁶⁵ In a Bombali district chiefdom, a respondent said the practice of compulsory chief’s work was ended in 1986 when a particular parliamentarian came to power who considered it “slavery”; others disagreed. Similar discrepancies existed in the Bo district chiefdom, where some people said chief’s work was never compulsory either before or after the war.

⁶⁶ Peters et al., “What Happens to Youth,” 20.

⁶⁷ Fanthorpe, “Chiefdom Governance,” 21.

⁶⁸ Archibald and Richards, “Converts to Human Rights,” 350.

⁶⁹ Other authors have also noted this. As explained in et al., “The sense of grievance of youths at the actions of the elders who ‘volunteer’ their efforts is sharpened by the practice of chiefs protecting their own children from doing communal work. In fact, many children of chiefs are no longer around to be protected, since they have been sent away for schooling. The young people left behind are not slow to express anger that the lack of the education they so ardently desire renders them particularly open to exploitation for community work” (15).

⁷⁰ Richards et al., “Social Capital and Survival,” 43.

⁷¹ Archibald and Richards describe this dynamic in the mass displacement of rural populations to urban camps in 1994–1995: “Camp life exposed differential value structures to critical scrutiny. For a start, rural commoners from far and wide compared notes. Many found out, for the first time, what people paid for farm produce in town. A frequent conclusion was that ‘our eyes are open’ to the abuses of rural elites (both traders and the politicians and chiefs who colluded with them).” Archibald and Richards, “Converts to Human Rights,” 357. A similar description is included in Richards et al., “Social Capital and Survival.”

⁷² Richards et al., “Social Capital and Survival,” 36.

⁷³ Archibald and Richards, “Converts to Human Rights,” 356.

⁷⁴ Richards et al., “Social Capital and Survival,” iv.

⁷⁵ Archibald and Richards, “Converts to Human Rights.”

⁷⁶ Peters et al., “What Happens to Youth,” 12.

⁷⁷ The author would like to thank external reviewer Tim Kelsall, a political scientist at the University of Newcastle, for this suggestion.

⁷⁸ As a 2004 report argues, “In many Chiefdoms, governance issues of critical importance are addressed within the confines of secret societies and not by chiefdom governance structures. These issues are likely to be longstanding disputes dealing with land and/or local political authorities.” DFID, *Identifying Options for Improving Chiefdom and Community Governance in Sierra Leone* (London: Department for International Development, 2004), 14. Another 2004 study,

published by the World Bank, discusses societies (sodalities) as a form of social capital (Richards et al., “Social Capital and Survival,” 9-11). In a more recent article, R. Fanthorpe argues that Sierra Leone’s societies have tended to be strengthened rather than threatened by political modernity. He argues that societies played an important role during the civil war, and in its aftermath were one of the institutions that many people were anxious to reinstate. Using newspaper reports as evidence, he highlights a number of incidents in postwar Sierra Leone that he says illustrate the societies’ continued importance, particularly in politics and community-level disputes. R. Fanthorpe, “Sierra Leone: the Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation,” A Writenet Report (Geneva: UNHCR, August 2007).

⁷⁹ Most literature, as well as conventional wisdom, say that the majority (most say as high as 80–90 percent) of people are initiated into secret societies. A 2007 national household survey found that just 29 percent of respondents nationally, rising to 37 percent in villages, identified themselves as members of traditional societies. IRCBP, *National Public Services Survey*. The cause of this discrepancy is unclear, but there may have been problems with translating the survey, or of people underreporting to enumerators.

⁸⁰ J4P/LG researchers found signs of this decline in a number of communities. For instance, although it remains usual (and often mandatory) for candidates for paramount chieftaincy to be members of the local society, some of the newer and more educated chiefs seem to have more lukewarm views on the societies. Other individuals whose parents served important roles in the local society have refused on religious or other grounds to take their place. In a peri-urban community in the Western Area, respondents confirmed that societies used to play many of the decision-making and dispute-resolution functions outlined above, but argued that the societies had declined significantly as a result of urbanization and Islam. Even in the most remote of the main research sites, in Moyamba district—a district well-known for the strength of its cultural practices, including the Sande, Poro, and Wunde societies—there are signs that the local Poro society has significantly decreased in power and influence. For example, the Poro society used to be responsible for cleaning the water wells and setting rules for their use, but no longer does so. In another case from the same chiefdom, authorities refused to support the initiation of a local Poro society and later ruled against the society members in a rare public hearing. One respondent argued that the influence of secret societies in that chiefdom had diminished due to the spread of Islam (respondent details not available), although another possibility is that the Poro is being replaced in importance by the locally powerful Wunde society.

⁸¹ World Bank, “Justice for the Poor and Understanding Processes of Change in Local Governance - Sierra Leone Concept Note” (Washington, DC: World Bank, December 2006).

⁸² This paper does not attempt to include an exhaustive review of literature on youth and Sierra Leone, but does cite a number of relevant materials. These are listed here. For a longer literature review on this and other justice and governance issues in Sierra Leone, please see P. Dale, “Access to Justice in Sierra Leone: A Review of the Literature” (Washington, DC: World Bank, May 2008),

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTJUSFORPOOR/Resources/Access2JusticeSierraLeoneLitReview.pdf>.

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