

CCS WORKING PAPERS

ANNE MENZEL

FOREIGN INVESTMENT, LARGE-SCALE LAND DEALS, AND UNCERTAIN “DEVELOPMENT” IN SIERRA LEONE

IMPACTS, CONFLICTS, AND SECURITY CONCERN



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KONTAKT:

Zentrum für Konfliktforschung
Philipps-Universität Marburg
Ketzerbach 11
35032 Marburg
Telefon: 0 64 21 / 28 24 444
konflikt@staff.uni-marburg.de
www.uni-marburg.de/konfliktforschung

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DIE AUTORIN

Anne Menzel

Dr. Anne Menzel is a Visiting Research Fellow at the SFB/TRR 138 “Dynamics of Security. Types of Securitization from a Historical Perspective”. She is currently developing a research project on the security-development nexus in Sierra Leone. Her research has focused on everyday life in war and post-war contexts (especially Sierra Leone), peacebuilding, development, and social change and conflict.

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“DEVELOPMENT” IN SIERRA LEONE
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ABSTRACT

Sierra Leone recently attracted significant inflows of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in export-oriented mining and agribusiness. These investments have usually involved large-scale land deals with local communities that have been facilitated and brokered by government officials, local politicians, and paramount chiefs. Affected people and communities were supposed to receive compensations for lost land and, in addition, they expected to find gainful employment opportunities with multinational companies. But they have often seen little of the FDI-driven development that they had expected and that had been promised to them. Based on available studies and my own field research, this paper will describe and discuss impacts, conflicts, and security concerns related to foreign investment in mining and agribusiness in Sierra Leone. Through these descriptions and discussions I hope to offer a disconcerting perspective into the uncertainties and ambiguities of FDI-driven development in Sierra Leone – a “development” that has often brought no tangible betterment for affected people and communities but rather confirmed and even escalated experiences of marginalization and disappointment.

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IMPACTS, CONFLICTS, AND SECURITY CONCERNS

“Yet for all the burdens we carry as a nation, we increasingly walk with a spring in our step. From mining to infrastructure, agribusiness to renewable energy, tourism to fisheries, our economy has great potential. The foundations have been laid; Sierra Leone is now ready for significant, high return investment. We are a people of limited means but of unlimited ambition. It is time to join us in fulfilling that ambition. It is time to think differently about Sierra Leone. It is time to visit our country and witness the opportunities it offers first hand. And when you have seen what Sierra Leone has to offer, I believe you will share my conviction that...it is time...to invest...in Sierra Leone! Thank you.”

The President of Sierra Leone, His Excellency Ernest Bai Koroma, from a speech delivered at the 2009 Sierra Leone Trade and Investment Forum in London (Koroma 2009).

1. INTRODUCTION

The small West African country Sierra Leone, which – before the current Ebola epidemic – used to be most widely known for its past civil war violence (1991–2002), quite suddenly became one of Africa’s fastest growing economies in the early 2010s. Largely due to the commencement of operations of two multinational iron ore companies in central and northern Sierra Leone, real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth reached 15.2 percent in 2012 and is estimated at an even more impressive 16.3 percent for 2013 (Zayid 2014: 3). The 2014 African Economic Outlook accordingly characterizes the recent growth spurt as “iron ore led”, referring to export-oriented foreign investment in the mining sector: “Prior to the commencement of iron-ore mining and export, growth rates, driven by increased activities in agriculture, construction, manufacturing and services sectors, averaged 5.7% per annum” (Zayid 2014: 3). However, agriculture – or, more precisely, export-oriented agribusiness – also showed promise in terms of future GDP growth: “The country has witnessed significant private-sector inflows as foreign direct investment (FDI) has increased three-fold during the past five

years” (Zayid 2014: 8); and a significant portion of these FDI inflows went into prospective agribusiness. According to estimates by the NGO coalition Action for Large-Scale Land Acquisition Transparency (ALLAT),² at least 1,154,777 hectare, about 21.4 percent of the country’s total arable land, were leased to foreign agribusiness investors in the short time period between 2009 and 2012. These agribusiness leases, which do not even include additional leases in the mining sector, usually have a running time of 50 years with the possibility of extensions (ALLAT 2013: 14).

A significant driver of foreign investment in export-oriented agribusiness has been political and economic enthusiasm for biofuels. Globally, small Sierra Leone (with a population of roughly 6 million and a total area of 71.740 km², just slightly larger than Ireland) recently became one of the most sought after locations for biofuel investments (see

² ALLAT is a coalition formed by a number of international, national, and local NGOs in Sierra Leone, such as Search for Common Ground (international), Campaign for Good Governance, Green Scenery (national), Malen Affected Landowners’ Association, Partners Initiative for Conflict Transformation (local), and many more (see ALLAT 2013: 92).

Nolte/Ostermeier/Schultze 2014: 4).³ The most prominent agribusiness investor in Sierra Leone, Addax Bioenergy (a subsidiary of the Switzerland-based Addax & Oryx Group), started production in May 2014 (see Addax Bioenergy 2014). In 2013, the company's investment in northern Sierra Leone was approved as a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) project of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It is the first sugarcane-based power generation project for ethanol production to be registered as a CDM project in Africa (see Addax Bioenergy 2013). The company, which – in addition to its export targets – also stated the aim of generating 120 GWh per year for the national grid in Sierra Leone (see Addax Bioenergy 2013), has also received praise from Sierra Leone President Ernest Bai Koroma (see Addax Bioenergy 2014); and it has been criticized by local, national, and international NGOs (see ALLAT 2013; ActionAid 2013). Its critics have pointed out that the Addax investment has had significant negative impacts on affected local communities – even though Addax is still considered a comparatively “good” investor, not least on account of its compensation policy for landowners who lost access to their lands due to the Addax investment: “In the absence of an official and binding national crop compensation list, Addax Bioenergy should be credited for its transparency and documentation of compensation paid to affected landowners, and for having developed a detailed agricultural asset list. This states compensation values for 59 different crop and tree types, and includes values for farm huts and fence lines” (ALLAT 2013: 40).

The Addax case is roughly representative of the uncertainties and ambiguities that have accompanied recent FDI inflows in both mining and agribusiness. International donors, investors, the Sierra Leonean Government, and also many upper and middle class Sierra Leoneans (professionals, business people, education elites etc.) emphasize the development prospects associated (or assumed to be associated) with FDI; but most Sierra Leoneans still struggle to make ends meet – more than half the population lives, or struggles to exist, below the national poverty line.⁴ Recent reports by local, national, and international NGOs⁵ have drawn attention to negative impacts of large-scale land deals with

multipational companies and, in response, were criticized by government officials for allegedly overstating problems and spoiling the investment climate (see e.g. Temple 2014; Koroma 2014). There have been suspicions of corruption by government officials, local politicians, and traditional authorities – most importantly paramount chiefs^{–6} involved in facilitating land leases as well as alleged threats and violations against labor activists; both have usually been impossible to prove or discard due to a lack of hard evidence.⁷ Public protests have been condemned by government officials and, in some instances (mostly pertaining to the mining sector), were violently dissolved by paramilitary state police forces (see e.g. Medico International et al. 2013; Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2014).

A common argument that has been brought forth to counter public discontent is that members of affected communities are allegedly having “unrealistic” expectations with regard to their rights and abilities to benefit from FDI. For example, during a workshop organized by the government’s Attitudinal and Behavioral Change Secretariat in August 2013, the Minister of Youth Affairs stressed that young people,

4 This is according to World Bank data and estimates (see World Bank 2014a). In Dollar-terms, more than 80 percent of the population is estimated to live on less than US\$2 per day (see World Bank 2014b). Life expectancy at birth is 45 years (see World Bank 2014c). As is usually the case, the numbers tend to vary across organizations, for slightly different numbers see, for example, the Sierra Leone country page of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP 2014).

5 See The Oakland Institute (2011), Welthungerhilfe (2012), Medico International et al. (2013), ActionAid (2013), ALLAT (2013), HRW (2014).

6 Although it is often regarded as a central element of Sierra Leonean “traditional” culture, not least by Sierra Leoneans themselves, the chieftancy system is, in large parts, a relict of British colonial indirect rule (see e.g. Fanthorpe 2001: 379–384; Shaw 2002: 234–237). Recent local governance reforms in the context of post-war peacebuilding have not fundamentally challenged chiefly authority. Rather, they have introduced an additional “layer” of governance institutions, local councils, which are part of the formal state governance structure. Paramount chiefs and their sub-chiefs are supposed to cooperate with, and fulfill tax-collection functions on behalf of local councils. In their respective chiefdoms – the central administrative units within Sierra Leone’s districts (outside the capital city Freetown and the surrounding Western Area) – paramount chiefs and their sub-chiefs also administer customary law in informal courts. Though their rulings are often accused of being biased against lower-status people, these courts usually present the only kind of legal mechanism that most people have access to (see Jackson 2006; Sawyer 2008). Paramount chiefs are also regarded as “custodians of the land” and, as such, exercise authority with regard to land allocation (see e.g. Unruh/Turray 2006). I will elaborate on this last point in section 3 of this paper.

7 See e.g. ALLAT (2013: 14); Menzel (2013); Human Rights Watch (2014: 63–66).

3 The biofuel investment influx country ranking provided by Nolte, Ostermeier and Schulze (2014) is based on data gathered by The Land Matrix, a global land monitoring initiative that promotes transparency and accountability in decisions over land and investment, see <http://landmatrix.org/en/> (last accessed 09 January 2015).

“should strive to empower themselves in order not to be left out of the Agenda for Prosperity [the motto and title of the current Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Sierra Leone, which states the aim of making Sierra Leone a middle income country by 2035], as the agenda has no room for people with negative attitude but those with determination” (Bangura 2013). In other words, Sierra Leoneans are called upon to first become ready for development before they can receive it. During field research in Lunsar (a town in the immediate vicinity of one of the two growth-driving iron ore mines) in early 2014, this view was echoed by a teacher at a local vocational training center. He complained that, “even the women who sell at the market think that London Mining [the multination iron ore company] should employ them, just because they [London Mining] have come into this area. They don’t understand that they have no skills that might be valuable for the company, which is why their expectations are just unrealistic” (interview, February 2014, Lunsar). However, it appears that people were often persuaded to welcome investors and give up their lands, only because they expected – and were promised – gainful employment opportunities in return. With regard to large-scale land deals for both, mining and agribusiness, it often remains unclear whether such promises were actually made by company representatives or by government officials, politicians, and paramount chiefs involved in facilitating land deals (see e.g. ALLAT 2013: 43-44; ActionAid 2013: 15; HRW 2014: 25). In this context, framing affected people’s expectations as being “unrealistic” is nothing short of cynical. When I argued this point in the interview with the teacher in Lunsar, he countered that the fact that people had “let themselves be fooled by such promises” only highlighted the need for adult education programs like the ones (focusing on functional adult literacy) that were currently being co-sponsored by London Mining as part of their corporate social responsibility (interview, February 2014, Lunsar).⁸

Based on available studies and my own field research,⁹ this paper will describe and discuss impacts, conflicts, and security concerns related to mining and agribusiness FDI and large-scale land deals in Sierra Leone. I begin by providing a brief background on FDI-oriented development policies in

and for Sierra Leone and then arrange my descriptions and discussions along three focus areas: land negotiations and community (un-)involvement, gendered livelihood impacts, and conflicts and security concerns. What emerges, or what I hope will become “visible” for readers, is a disconcerting perspective into the uncertainties and ambiguities of FDI-driven development in Sierra Leone – a “development” that has often brought no tangible betterment for affected people and communities but rather confirmed and even escalated experiences of marginalization and disappointment.¹⁰

While preparing the final version of this paper, in January 2015, it certainly feels like a strange time for writing about impacts, conflicts, and security concerns related to FDI and large-scale land deals in Sierra Leone. In light of the ongoing Ebola epidemic the issues and concerns raised and discussed in this paper may appear extremely secondary – if not outdated. But this is not the case. The politics of, and disappointing experiences with uncertain and ambiguous “development” inform the socio-political context in which efforts to contain the epidemic are currently taking place. I will return to this point in the conclusion.

2. BACKGROUND: RUNNING THE COUNTRY LIKE A BUSINESS

In late 2007, close to six years after the end of the war, Sierra Leoneans experienced what has since been described as a “watershed moment” (Kandeh 2008: 603) in the country’s peace process: Following a rough and sporadically violent campaigning period leading up to Sierra Leone’s second post-war general elections in 2007 (see Christensen/Utas 2008), the electoral process nonetheless culminated in a non-

9 My first field research in Sierra Leone was in Bo Town and Bo District (southern Sierra Leone) from January until May 2009. More recently, I conducted field research in Freetown, the Western Area, Kenema, Bo District and Kono District in September and October 2013, and in Freetown, Lunsar, Kenema, Bo District and Kono District from January until March 2014. My first field research in 2009 was focused on post-war expectations of violence and readiness to resort to violence (for my PhD thesis, see Menzel 2015); the 2013 and 2014 research stays were related to consultancies and focused on intergenerational and gender-related conflicts. However, I also found time to inquire about hopes, resentments, expectations, and experiences related to FDI and FDI-oriented development policies; and I extended the 2014 research stay beyond the consultancy contract period in order to spend time in the mining town Lunsar.

10 For theoretical perspectives on, and broader critical discussions of “development” in the Global South, see e.g. Ferguson (1990; 2006), Escobar (1995), Duffield (2007), Wai (2007).

8 These adult education courses were being implemented as part of a pilot project collaboration between London Mining, the Sierra Leone government, and the German development agency Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ 2013).

violent transfer of power from the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) to the opposition All People's Congress (APC) and its presidential candidate Ernest Bai Koroma. The newly elected government soon made it clear – both at home and abroad – that it sought to lead the still desperately poor and long-suffering people of Sierra Leone on a new and more promising path towards development: by making Sierra Leone "open for business" and "running the country like a business". These slogans have since been repeated in interviews, speeches, on billboards, and also in a promotion video addressing potential investors. This video, which was produced by the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA) and shown at the Sierra Leone Trade and Investment Forum held in London in November 2009, blatantly puts the country's natural resources on offer: among them diamonds, gold, iron ore, beautiful beaches, "some of the most underfished territorial waters in the world", and fertile lands offering opportunities to produce "high value products like rice, cocoa, and cashew" in addition to food crops like palm oil and sugar, which "offer additional opportunities as bio-fuels" (SLIEPA 2009). The Forum was organized by Tony Blair's Africa Governance Initiative and attended and endorsed by influential individuals such as Tony Bair himself, George Soros, and British banker Lord Dennis Stevenson (see Africa Governance Initiative 2009; Investment International 2009). SLIEPA has been receiving support from the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation, the Department for International Development (DFID), and the European Union (see The Oakland Institute 2011: 13; ALLAT 2013: 14).

This FDI-oriented approach presented a break with the previous and, again, donor-supported vision for development, which had been focused on developing smallholder agriculture and had even included a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan that was formulated in 2003 but never implemented (see ALLAT 2013: 17). After the 2007 elections, the focus shifted to small holder commercialization aiming, "to promote 'farming as a business' by focusing on value chains for a small number of commodity and cash crops, on value adding and on increasing agricultural production through intensification and mechanisation" (ALLAT 2013: 13; see also Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program 2010). With the support of major donors the Sierra Leone government has since promoted smallholder commercialization as an adequate bottom-up complement to FDI-driven development, rather than family farming with "hoe and cutlass"

(see The Oakland Institute 2011: 12).

During field research in southern Sierra Leone in 2009, I often heard people refer to small holder commercialization as "tractorization"; they had heard over the radio that farmers were supposed to receive donor-funded "help" in the form of modern machinery, but had seen none of it. When I again visited the same area in rural Bo District in 2013 and 2014, even all talk of "tractorization" had vanished (although commercialization programs are still ongoing). Instead, the villages were buzzing with talk about foreign investors who had come to see the local paramount chief in order to discuss the terms of a land lease for a large rubber plantation. Though there was much enthusiasm for the investment project, many farmers also worried that they would not really benefit from the deal. The paramount chief himself was adamant that he would not allow the investors to proceed unless they guaranteed to provide training and education for local people – so that they would be able to get "real" jobs with the company instead of just "suffering" as cheap agricultural laborers (interviews in rural Bo District, October 2013 and February 2014). He was aware of previous "difficulties" with land deals and explained that there had been a conference of paramount chiefs from all parts of the country at which these issues had been discussed. He was also in contact with the NGO Welthungerhilfe (aka German Agro Action), which has a field office in Bo Town and has been seeking to facilitate the formulation of district-level binding guidelines for dealing with investors – in cooperation with Bo District Council and local paramount chiefs. I have since learned from email correspondence with Welthungerhilfe staff that the formulation /negotiation processes are ongoing and have been difficult, not least due to the opposition of some local stakeholders including the paramount chief I interviewed. During our interviews and conversations I certainly had the impression that the paramount chief felt that he himself (a US-trained economist) would be best suited to guarantee mutually beneficial community-investor relations and that he strongly resented any kind of outside "meddling". He advised me that I should be careful when asking critical questions about FDI in Sierra Leone, because the government authorities were tired of Western criticism that would only impede the country's development progress. He reminded me that Western countries had not been particularly environment and human-rights conscious when they themselves developed and industrialized, so why should it be any different in Sierra Leone? Why were

Sierra Leoneans supposed to do “everything at once”? He also stressed that he saw no viable alternative to FDI-driven development, as it would bring much needed modernization. Were Sierra Leoneans supposed to work with their hands and cutlasses for the rest of eternity? And how would they be getting the technology and knowhow they needed and wanted if not through FDI? Conventional development aid had certainly not provided them (interviews in rural Bo District, October 2013 and February 2014).

At the same time – and amidst high hopes – it remains far from certain that FDI will eventually deliver overall net development benefits to most Sierra Leoneans. Several reports by local, national, and international NGOs have drawn attention to considerable downsides that have accompanied recent FDI-inflows.¹¹ These include complaints about questionable working conditions provided by foreign companies and about mismanagement and corruption in the facilitation of large-scale land deals; negative effects on health (especially in the form of malnutrition) and on education-affordability in affected areas where farmers have lost access to farmland and bush-resources (such as firewood etc.) and face rising everyday living costs; and disruptions in community social relations, for example, because women and girls engage in sex-work catering to more or less “local” foreign company workers, who have money to spend and who are quite often locally unattached “strangers” (newcomers to the particular locality). There have been clandestine incidents of destruction and theft of company property as well as sporadic public protests in immediately affected areas. Such protests often start out peacefully but turn violent with the intervention of armed police forces – who are often suspected to stand in the pay of foreign companies (see e.g. Medico International et al. 2013; HRW 2014: 46-58). In an interview with HRW, Police Inspector General Francis Munu stated, “that there are informal guidelines for how companies can pay the police for specific functions, but no national laws govern the payment of police by private firms” (HRW 2014: 57). In a conversation I had with an officer of the Operational Support Division (OSD), a paramilitary police force, he explained in more detail that any type of armed private security was not welcome in Sierra Leone, as it would “undermine the state”. If private persons or companies required armed services, they would have

to subcontract OSD personnel (informal conversation in Kenema, February 2014). The clear subtext was that the latter type of arrangement did not constitute an act undermining the state: because private business and the investor-friendly government are already on the same side.

The Sierra Leone government has indeed firmly condemned protests and rejected public criticism directed at investors’ business practices, the handling of large-scale land deals, and “police brutality”, as many Sierra Leoneans refer to recent violent incidents. A core argument against protests and public criticism has been that they run the risk of damaging the reputation of the country and of its development-oriented government and, in consequence, have to be regarded as acts of sabotage against Sierra Leone’s development prospects. The harsh rejection of a HRW report (2014) focusing on land deals with African Minerals Limited (the company operating the growth-driving iron ore mine in Bumbuna, Tonkolili District) and on police shots fired at protesters in Bumbuna in 2012, presents a case in point. The Freetown based daily newspaper Sierra Leone News Hunters quotes President Ernest Bai Koroma rejecting the report and asserting that, “‘The people of Sierra Leone are wise enough now to distinguish between development and backwardness, and nobody would be fooled to believe that what AML [African Minerals Limited] is doing is not in the interest of the people,’ [...] President Koroma stated that the saboteurs are merely wasting their time, as according to him, the AML is here to stay” (Koroma 2014: 3).¹²

This pattern of grievances, protest, and rejection is evident in all three focus areas to be discussed in the following sections.

3. LAND NEGOTIATIONS AND COMMUNITY (UN-)INVOLVEMENT

A common complaint voiced by communities affected by large-scale land deals pertains to their involvement – or rather un-involvement – in land lease negotiation processes. A particularly well documented case is that of communities in Malen chiefdom, Pujehun District,¹³ where Welthungerhilfe facilitated a “Project on Food Security and Rehabilitation of Rural Infrastructure” (funded by the German Federal Mi-

12 For additional reading on the report and its rejection, see e.g. Temple (2014) and Peligal (2014).

13 For roughly similar cases – regarding large-scale land deals for both, agribusiness and mining investments – see ALLAT (2013), ActionAid (2013), and HRW (2014).

11 See e.g. The Oakland Institute (2011), Welthungerhilfe (2012), Medico International et al. (2013), ActionAid (2013), ALLAT (2013), HRW (2014).

nistry for Economic Cooperation and Development) in close coordination with local authorities and the Sierra Leone Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Food Security (MAFFS). The project started in October 2010. In May 2011, however, Welthungerhilfe was surprised to learn that the area designated for the project had been leased to Socfin Agricultural Company S.L. Limited (SAC, a subsidiary of the Belgian corporation Socfin), a company planning to establish palm oil and eventually rubber plantations in the project area (see Welthungerhilfe 2012: 9; AL-LAT 2013: 23). Neither MAFFS nor local authorities – the District Council and local paramount chief – had informed Welthungerhilfe about the company's investment plans and the land deal that had already been arranged.

A subsequent research undertaken by Welthungerhilfe in cooperation with the Sierra Leonean NGO Green Scenery showed that many immediately affected local farmers had not been aware of the actual size of the lease-area for the SAC investment, which turned out to be significantly larger than what they had anticipated: "The people affected by the investment had understood that only a smaller plantation, the former Sierra Leone Production and Marketing Board (SLPMB) Plantation once managed by the government, would be leased to a company. Only one village said they had clearly understood that it was not just this plantation that would be affected. The majority of villagers realized in a later meeting in January/February 2011 that '*all land will be taken*'. Some people even said that only during a 'Reconciliation Meeting' in May 2011 [...] had it become clear to them that their land was already allocated to the company" (Welthungerhilfe 2012: 12; original italics).

It appears that the Malen chiefdom paramount chief had given his consent to the lease without adequately informing, let alone consulting with landowning families and that the lease was signed in a context in which its content remained obscure to many signatories. During a signing ceremony in March 2011, no attempt was made to translate the lease agreement into local languages; instead, as the paramount chief himself recounted in an interview with Welthungerhilfe, the agreement, which was written in English (which is not widely spoken or understood in Sierra Leone, especially not in rural

Sierra Leone, even though it is the official language),¹⁴ was read out aloud and thereby "made public" (see Welthungerhilfe 2012: 15).

Land rights in Sierra Leone are a complex affair, to say the least. In Sierra Leone's districts (the former colonial protectorate) – or, put differently, in all areas outside of the capital city Freetown and the Western Area (the former British crown colony) – land is "inalienable", that is, it cannot be sold. The only option for foreigners seeking land is to lease it from the relevant authorities. In theory, these are the paramount chiefs with regard to so called community land and the (usually male) heads of landowning families with regard to family land (see Welthungerhilfe 2012: 7; SLIEPA 2012: 4-10). In practice, this distinction is far from clear-cut. Paramount chiefs are often regarded as a more general "custodians of the land" and, as such, also exercise authority in the allocation of family land (see Unruh/Turay 2006: 27). In the case of the SAC lease it appears that land owning families were pressured by the paramount chief and by the government's resident minister. One family head relayed in an interview that, "I rejected the rent payment on behalf of the Sellu family. The chief then told me 'whether or not you like it and whether or not you accept the money, the company will come and work on your land'" (Welthungerhilfe 2012: 16). By comparison, the negotiation process that was going on during my 2013 and 2014 visits in rural Bo District (see section 2) certainly seemed more transparent, though I suspect that it also involved some amount of nudging and/or the application of more or less gentle pressure. As the paramount chief and one of his section chiefs put it in our interviews and conversations, people did not always know how to act in their own best interest. Their rationale as development-oriented authorities included the premise that their people would need to be guided for the sake of their own good (interviews and conversations in rural Bo District, October 2013 and February 2014).

Back to Pujehun: After the SAC lease was finalized and the affected families had, for better or worse, accepted it – without major protests and still hoping that some benefits would come their way – there was

¹⁴ The Sierra Leonean lingua franca is Krio, an English-oriented Kreol, which is widely spoken and understood throughout the country. However, many people in rural areas are only fluent in the language(s) of their respective ethnic group(s). The two largest ethno-linguistic groups in Sierra Leone are Temne and Mende – the latter would have been the most appropriate language for conducting land negotiations in Pujehun District.

much disappointment over corporate social responsibility projects that had been promised but did not match up to widely-shared expectations and over the amount of yearly surface rent; the latter is paid to the heads of landowning families in addition to one-time compensation paid for lost plant-assets.¹⁵ According to ALLAT, “SAC pays US\$5 per acre (12.50 per hectare) a year.¹⁶ That amount is distributed according to the same formula developed by MAFFS, with 50 per cent going to landowners, 20 per cent each to the district councils and chiefdom councils, and the remaining 10 per cent going to the national government.¹⁷ This distribution has been criticized by civil society groups, which view it as a possible incentive for authorities that do not suffer damage from land deals to support them. In order to deal with the resulting tensions a ‘grievance committee’ was set up” (ALLAT 2013: 43). Said “grievance committee” was set up as part of SAC’s corporate social responsibility commitments and is chaired by Malen chiefdom’s paramount chief, who promptly requested that US\$25,000 of funds awarded to the committee be spent on a presidential guest lodge in the chiefdom headquarters; the request was approved by SAC (see ALLAT 2013: 47). Eventually, in September 2012, there were some sporadic protests when SAC began measuring land beyond the area of the initial plantation (see above) and therefore beyond what most landowning families had been willing to agree to. These protests were treated as acts of sabotage and petty crime: “Land beyond the initial plantation area was to be measured by SAC. The villagers of Basaleh area refused access to the SAC delegation. SAC returned the next day with the police; the villagers still refused access. As a result, four people were arrested and the

15 There are no binding regulations for compensation payments. There is only a list of recommendations provided by MAFFS: “Only 30 kinds of crops/trees/rural resources are on the list and the very highest compensation rate is Le 200,000 [US\$46.35] for an orange tree or a half acre of upland rice. The lowest is Le 400 [US\$0.09] for a single plant of local garden egg [eggplant, A.M.]. The compensation for an ‘economic tree (timber)’ is, for example, Le 20,000 [US\$4.60]. Compensation for an indigenous oil palm is Le 25,000 [US\$5.80] and for an improved variety is Le 40,000 [US\$9.27], not even close to the value of the oils that each type of tree produces in a single year” (ALLAT 2013: 40).

16 For comparison: According to findings reported by ALLAT, Addax Bioenergy pays US\$8.89 per hectare per annum and Sierra Leone Agriculture (a subsidiary of the SIVA Group, an Indian conglomerate), which focuses on palm oil for ethanol production in Port Loko District, pays only US\$2 per hectare (ALLAT 2013: 43).

17 A similar rent distribution scheme has also been implemented in mining investment areas (see HRW 2014: 23).

measurements discontinued. In another area where SAC tried to initiate demarcation, Banaleh, the villagers seized computers and other equipment from the SAC delegation and reported to the police in Pujehun. SAC, after retrieving the equipment, accused the villagers of having damaged it” (Welthungerhilfe 2012: 15).

It can safely be summarized that the manner in which large-scale land deals are negotiated (or, indeed, settled without meaningful community involvement) dependents entirely on the priorities, intentions, and characters of investors and national and local authorities. Although SLIEPA has issued guidelines on “best practices” for investors’ interactions with local communities that insist on a process that, “involves the careful engagement of grassroots stakeholders, paying particular attention to the role of landowners, in keep with customary rules” (SLIEPA 2012: 10),¹⁸ these guidelines remain vague and, moreover, unbinding.

4. GENDERED LIVELIHOOD IMPACTS

The advertisement of available land for foreign investment in Sierra Leone is based on the assumption and claim that significant portions of the country’s arable land are – presumably – unused (see SLIEPA 2009). However, much of this presumably unused land is fallow land that needs to be left fallow in order to restore fertility (see ALLAT 2013: 15). At the same time, fallow lands still provide much needed nutritional inputs and resources for local communities: “Fallow land is in fact not unused land but serves various purposes. If a field is no longer used for annual crops, other useful plants like bananas are cultivated and can be harvested in the transition to the fallow phase. Fallow land also provides building materials, firewood and medicinal plants. It is also a hunting ground for bush meat, which contributes a considerable portion of protein to the local diet” (Welthungerhilfe 2012: 5). Fallow or not, the assumption that leased-out land will not be missed is untenable. It has already become clear that those who lose access to land due to large-scale land deals face severe impacts on their livelihoods.

For one, compensation and surface rent payments offered as part of the lease agreements do not even come close to making up for the resources and livelihood-opportunities that have been lost.¹⁹ In an

18 Such “best practice” guidelines had already been issued in 2010 (see e.g. Welthungerhilfe 2012: 8).

19 See Welthungerhilfe (2012: 19-22), ALLAT (2013: 29-49),

interview with Welthungerhilfe one farmer reported that, when he finally received his share of the annual surface rent payment, it only amounted to 5.000 Leones – roughly one Euro per year (Welthungerhilfe 2012: 20). Rent payments are made to the (usually male) heads of landowning families, who then distribute them according to their own patronage priorities; these tend to discriminate against junior male members of the respective family – and against women. Women are usually not granted “their own rights” with regard to family land. Rather, they are given land by their husband or another male family member, often in order to grow vegetables and fruits for the family’s own use and for surpluses to be sold at local markets. Without direct access to food stuffs from their own lands (traditionally women’s vegetable gardens and men’s rice farms)²⁰ and being forced to purchase food on an everyday basis and at rising costs, families struggle to maintain their nutritional standards and many face malnutrition and hunger. Based on interviews conducted in communities affected by the Addax, SAC, and Sierra Leone Agriculture²¹ investments, ALLAT found that many families who had previously eaten three meals per day had reduced their food intake to two or even to only one meal per day; the interviews were conducted during the harvest season, which had previously been a time of relative abundance (see ALLAT 2013: 51). In addition, income from women’s market sells is often used to pay for children’s school materials and fees. Although primary education is supposed to be free in Sierra Leone, parents usually have to contribute to the salaries of underpaid, unpaid, and, according to widespread complaints, often exploitative teachers. In consequence, many affected areas have seen an increase in the number of children who are being taken out of school (see ALLAT 2013: 50; HRW 2014: 34-35).

Secondly, a core promise associated with FDI-driven development, namely access to gainful employment opportunities, has (so far?) not materialized – at least not for many: “Indeed, a few years down the line, concerns are emerging over the relatively limited number of jobs that directly accrue from these investments” (Batmanglich/Enria 2014: 14). It is estimated that Sierra Leone’s unemployment rate still lingers at about 60 or 70 percent.²² These

ActionAid (2013: 10), HRW (2014: 31-34).

20 For a description of the traditional gendered division of labor and gendered purchasing responsibilities in rural Sierra Leone, see Coulter (2009: 66-72).

21 The company is a subsidiary of the SIVA Group and focuses on palm oil for ethanol production in Port Loko District.

22 These percentages are widely circulated and can, for exam-

percentages are shocking and also somewhat misleading. They clearly include large numbers of people who are self-employed (as traders, home-cooked food sellers, hairdressers, motorcycle-taxi drivers, car-wash boys etc.) or who labor – on an on-and-off basis at least – without receiving any or without receiving regular monetary pay. The problem, as Sierra Leoneans often put it, is that a “real” job is extremely hard to get; a “real” job meaning formal employment with a regular und sufficient salary, health benefits and, in consequence, some degree of security (see also Batmanglich/Enria 2014). While some companies, especially African Minerals and London Mining (the two growth-driving iron ore companies), offer gainful employment opportunities (often including health benefits for employees and their families) for skilled workers – for example, for experienced security personnel²³ and for those trained and able to operate specific machineries – daily agricultural labor is definitely not well-paid. For example, young women and men working as agricultural laborers for SAC make no more than 10.000 Leones per day, not even enough to provide one decent family meal per day (see Welthungerhilfe 2012: 27).

In many FDI-affected areas the expectation of gainful employment opportunities has also attracted strangers from other parts of the country and, especially in the iron ore areas, also from neighboring Guinea, who compete with the local labor force. This has led to tensions with, and to frustration on the part of local people, who feel that they should receive preferential employment-treatment, as they are the ones immediately (and adversely) affected by land deals (see Welthungerhilfe 2012: 25-27). During my research in Lunsar (the London Mining area) in February and March 2014, I often heard complaints that the “whole town is full of Guinea people”, and I met several London Mining employees who were struggling with Krio, the Sierra Leonean lingua franca, and instead preferred French. An expat trainer and recruiter with

ple, be found on the Sierra Leone country information pages provided by the World Bank (2014d) and UNDP (2014).

23 During my research in Lunsar (the London Mining area) in February and March 2014, I stayed with ex-combatants who had found or were hoping to find employment with Dawnus, a multinational company providing logistical and security services for London Mining. According to them, Dawnus was specifically looking to recruit ex-militaries with experience in Iraq. Under the official heading of “Overseas Youth Employment” the deployment of ex-combatants (from the 1991-2002 civil war) to Iraq had been organized by the Sierra Leone government in 2009. The Ministry of Labor chose and registered recruits who were then taken up by a private security company (for details see Christensen 2013; 2014).

London Mining explained to me that many Guinean applicants had more advanced technical training and experience as operators of heavy machinery and as mechanics, which gave them an advantage over Sierra Leoneans seeking employment with the company. However, I am not aware that this competition has led to any kind of generalized hatred or to attacks against migrant foreigners or Sierra Leonean strangers, neither in Lunsar nor anywhere else in the country.

The influx of strangers and foreigners into FDI-affected areas has also generated business opportunities for receiving communities: Migrant male workers, especially when they have money to spend, tend to create new opportunities with regard to housing, the selling of cooked food, nighttime entertainment – and sex-work (see also Welthungerhilfe 2012: 28). At the same time, prostitutes and prostitution are usually regarded as grave social evils in Sierra Leone.²⁴ This was a common topic during my field research in Lunsar. Many people I spoke to, men in particular, lamented the lack of moral conduct and consciousness among local women offering themselves in the newly established posh night club, which was frequented by those who had already found gainful employment and regarded with envy by those who were still seeking it. The town was bursting full with mostly male job-seekers who had submitted their application at the London Mining office and were waiting and hoping to be called for an interview.²⁵ I also discussed prostitution and its moral implications with a woman in her late thirties

24 Many people differentiate between prostitution, which does not seek to hide its purely commercial character, and a specific type of “boyfriend-girlfriend”-relationship that basically amounts to an exchange of sex and money but also contains some elements of a more legitimate relationship; “boyfriend-girlfriend” arrangements are usually somewhat steady and the woman will likely also perform other “wifely” duties, such as cooking and washing for her man etc. This latter type of arrangement is fairly common and more accepted (see also Coulter 2009: 199-205).

25 I never encountered any Western (or, more precisely, recognizably Western or “white”) expat workers anywhere in Lunsar; it seemed that they only moved around in Land Cruisers and hardly interacted with the local population. This impression was confirmed by two London Mining expat employees. They explained that London Mining encouraged its expat employees to stay in their guarded quarters, though “some guys mess around with local girls” (conversations in February 2014). It may be that the city Makeni, a one hour drive from Lunsar, is the place to do just that. A recent blog post by a London School of Economics student who recently spent three months in Sierra Leone states that, “[a]nyone who has been to a major town in Sierra Leone called Makeni knows that white British miners sleep with under-age and vulnerable prostitutes” (Mosselmans 2014).

who ran a small cookery shop where she sold cheap meals and marihuana and, at night, sheltered homeless “street children”; most of them were male teenagers, but among them were also a few “lower-level” prostitutes catering to less affluent clients whom they found in the streets. This cookery shop owner called the moral outrage over prostitution and the stigmatization of prostitutes an immense hypocrisy. After all, she pointed out, it is men who frequent prostitutes. She herself had come to Lunsar from a nearby village, which had been relocated due to the mining operations.²⁶ She told me that she had much empathy with local women and girls who left their husbands or parents and came to Lunsar to “hustle” instead of staying in the villages where they had no prospects for a better life; in the bustling town one could at least hope that some opportunity might present itself one day (conversation in Lunsar, February 2014). The impact on family stability in affected areas is also noted in the Welthungerhilfe report on the SAC investment in Pujehun District: “Staff from the Welthungerhilfe project observed that some women left their husbands because the men had lost their fields and thus their source of livelihood. Usually the women return to their family of descent to get land for crop cultivation. Welthungerhilfe project staff called this phenomenon ‘semi-divorce’. Some men in the villages were worried that their wives would leave them because other men working in the plantation earned more” (Welthungerhilfe 2012: 30).

It is worth noting that such concerns pertaining to female conduct are certainly not new or unprecedented. Rather, they are a recurrent theme in Sierra Leone – especially in times of crisis and change. For example, David Rosen describes similar concerns based on his research in 1970s Kono District, where local women tried to rid themselves of the restrictions that their families and especially their husbands placed upon them. Their aim was to concentrate on doing business in order to benefit from the cash-availability in Kono, Sierra Leone’s main diamond mining area, due to its large and growing population of (male) migrant miners.²⁷ Rosen describes that, “[m]ale fears about female involvement in marketing focus upon the degree to which this involvement conflicts with, or undermines, the household. Men attach great stigma to marketing and sometimes see it as tantamount to prostitution” (Rosen 1981: 158). Based on research during and immediately after the civil war, Susan

26 On relocation in mining areas, see e.g. Network Movement for Justice and Development (2010); HRW (2014).

Shepler describes that female (ex-)combatants were sometimes even more stigmatized than their male counterparts, due to a moral discourse on female sexuality that branded female (ex-)fighters as spoiled goods: “Though, in practice, they often had very similar situations – they [female fighters] were abducted just as the boys were – there is some degree to which sexual activity, even rape, is perceived to be their own fault, or at least something which cannot easily be undone” (Shepler 2002: 11). The concern was that these women and girls who had been exposed to a lot of (forced) sex would not be controllable for peace-time husbands (see also Coulter 2009).

But their recurrent character certainly does not render such concerns inconsequential. They are likely to further increase jealousy-inspired “disciplinary” violence against women and girls in Sierra Leone. Husbands and also steady boyfriends are usually expected to have the right and even the responsibility to discipline their women to keep them in order. In my experience, this type of violence is still widely regarded as understandable and legitimate in Sierra Leone – by men and also by many women (see also UN Population Fund 2005). Women often interpret the beatings they receive from their men as a “sign of love”, “if he doesn’t beat me, he doesn’t love me” (conversation with a female university student in Bo Town, January 2009). However, women are often unwilling to submissively suffer the beatings of a husband or boyfriend who is no longer able to provide for them. In this case, they are likely to prefer separation (or “semi-divorce”, as described by Welthungerhilfe staff) in order to look for other

27 From the 1950s on Kono experienced a diamond rush that was largely driven by the comparatively easy accessibility of diamonds in Kono’s alluvial diamond fields: “Unlike South Africa, where diamond mining is associated with the mechanical mining of deep reserves, in Sierra Leone it is not uncommon to find a good quality diamond on the ground surface, particularly after rain” (Maconachie/Binns 2007: 370). Many of those migrating to Kono engaged in manual labor illicit mining (that is, mining without a formally attained government license): “In the early 1970s, diamond mining activities could be broadly divided into three types. First, the National Diamond Mining Company (NDMC) had the exclusive right to mine in two lease areas at Yengema (Kono District) and Tongo Field (Kenema District). Elsewhere, indigenous Sierra Leoneans could apply for mining licences under the Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme (ADMS), created in 1955. A third type of mining activity was ‘illicit mining’, where individuals and groups mined illegally in the company lease areas, or undertook unlicensed mining in ADMS designated areas” (Maconachie/Binns 2007: 371; on the political economy of diamond mining in pre-war Sierra Leone, see Reno 1995). During my field researches in 2009, 2013, and 2014, I often heard that it has become difficult to find alluvial diamonds; the deposits appear to be close to exhausted.

livelihood and survival options.

5. CONFLICTS AND SECURITY CONCERNS

Major sources of open conflict, which has been comparatively more prevalent in mining than in agribusiness areas, are the working conditions provided by foreign companies as well as bans that have been imposed on local employees joining a union of their choice or forming new unions (see Welthungerhilfe 2012: 27-28; Medico International et al. 2013; HRW 48-45). Complaints about working conditions mostly pertain to payment, workers’ physical security on the job (with regard to accidents), lack of due process in job dismissals, and racist mistreatment by expat staff. A particularly conflict-intensive relationship between expat staff and workers exists in the context of a comparatively older investment in industrial diamond mining in Kono District. Koidu Holdings, which was renamed OCTÉA in 2011 and which is now fully owned by the Geneva-based Barry Steinmetz Group, has been operating in Sierra Leone since shortly after the end of the civil war (see Gberie 2010: 10). Its origins can be traced back even further, to a deal between the war time military government (National Provisional Ruling Council, 1992-1996) and the South African private military company Executive Outcomes, which received mining concessions in lieu of monetary payment for its support in fighting the government-opposed Revolutionary United Front (see McIntyre/Weiss 2007: 72-74). During research in the Kono District capital town Koidu in October 2013, I met several current and former OCTÉA employees who fully agreed that the company had been mistreating them: the salaries were low, between 300.000 to 400.000 Leones per months (roughly around 60 EUR) for an “unskilled” worker, and even workers operating heavy machinery were considered “unskilled”; the work was dangerous and unhealthy, and there was no proper health/accident insurance; any small “mistake” during operations (such as a minor scratch on a machine) was punished by money being taken out of the worker’s salary; the lunch provided by the company was of low quality; and South African expat staff regularly used abusive and racist language when dealing with workers (interviews and conversations in Koidu, October 2013). But the workers were even more outraged about local and national politicians’ and traditional authorities’ corrupt involvements with the company. During a discussion with traders, laid off mining workers, and a local pas-

tor, they pointed out that one paramount chief in Koidu had openly declared – in a radio interview no less – that he regularly received “an envelope” (a bribe) from Koidu Holdings/OCTÉA. According to their account, the paramount chief went on to explain that he saw no reason to be ashamed. After all, he was a man with many responsibilities – and he claimed to know for a fact that even the Vice President (a Kono “son of the soil”) received his envelopes on a regular basis. My discussion partners stressed that, in consequence, it was hardly surprising that local and national authorities had been failing to protect the interests of Koidu Holdings/OCTÉA employees, who had repeatedly tried to draw attention to their various grievances: “The people [Koidu Holdings/OCTÉA management] openly tell us that our government is in their pockets...the police takes its share, the military takes its share, the local government officials take their own...so who can talk for us? This is our situation. It is so appalling. Because those people who should talk for us have already taken the side of the company” (interview with laid off workers/former strike leaders in Koidu, October 2013).

Following initially peaceful protests, a strike organized by Koidu Holdings/OCTÉA workers in December 2012 escalated into what became termed a “riot” and was dissolved by a police intervention that left many wounded and two people dead by gunshots. There are conflicting accounts on the course of the escalation. Whereas the police version describes thoroughly professional conduct on the side of the intervening OSD paramilitary police forces (see Awareness Times 2013), the former strike leaders assert that the “riot” only started with the involvement of police forces that took advantage of the general confusion and went on a looting spree, in which they were then joined by random opportunists. While the strike was unanimously condemned by government officials, neither the workers’ grievances nor the inflicted wounds and fatalities were found to be worthy of an official statement. Rather, the reaction suggested that any protest against foreign investors’ business practices must be regarded as unlawful. Even before the escalation, the strikers experienced that Vice President Sam Suamana – who had come to Koidu on a mediation mission – addressed them without regard for their grievances: “Rather than addressing the root causes, the Vice President blanketly blamed the protesters for what he referred to as taking the law into their hands and therefore ordered all present at a meeting summoned to address the aggrieved workers and community residents to sit down on the ground as a way of

demonstrating his anger at them for disrupting the operations of the company” (Medico International et al. 2013: 1). From the outset, the strikers were treated as riotous troublemakers.

Contrary to what one might expect, FDI inflows into Sierra Leone have not triggered a proliferation of heavily armed private security companies catering to the security and protection needs and/or desires of foreign companies. Though foreign companies certainly do employ their own private security personnel, it appears that they have to rely on Sierra Leonean police forces whenever they require *armed* services; their own private security personnel remain unarmed. In an interview with HRW, Police Inspector General Francis Munu stated, “that there are informal guidelines for how companies can pay the police for specific functions, but no national laws govern the payment of police by private firms” (HRW 2014: 57). An officer of the OSD, a paramilitary police division, explained to me in more detail that any type of armed private security was not welcome in Sierra Leone, as it would “undermine the state”; if private persons or companies required armed services, they would have to subcontract OSD personnel (informal conversation in Kenema, February 2014). The officer providing this statement was himself employed to guard the private residence of the prospective investors planning to do business (set up a rubber plantation) in rural Bo District (see section 2.). Only a few days later I met another OSD officer who was guarding a small diamond mining site (also in rural Bo District) that was run by an Australian entrepreneur. I approached this OSD officer, who was staying in a makeshift shed near the mining site, and asked him to explain his terms of engagement to me. Why was he guarding a private mining site? Was he not a regular police officer employed by the state? He answered that this was indeed the case but that, in Sierra Leone, the government was also taking care of private people (informal conversation in rural Bo District, February 2014).

From several more conversations with OSD officers and foreign company employees in different parts of the country (October 2013 and February-March 2014) emerged the following picture: It seems that OSD personnel can be hired for a fixed charge, which flows directly back to police headquarters and/or to some government department (this was a matter of speculation), while the subcontracted officers only receive their regular monthly salary plus optional bonuses from the respective client. In short, it seems that the police-leadership and/or whoever is in

charge of the process have effectively monopolized the armed private security business in Sierra Leone by public means.

Though it does indeed appear preferable to a proliferation of armed private security providers in many respects, this type of public-private arrangement comes with the consequence that state police forces – especially the OSD – have been directly involved in violence against protesting workers, sympathizers, and bystanders; most notably in Koidu in 2007 and 2012 (Network Movement for Justice and Development 2010; Medico International 2013) and in Bumbuna, a town in the African Minerals Limited iron ore mining area, in 2012 (see HRW 2014). The latter “incident”, which led to the confirmed death of a female protester (she was part of a group of women who wanted to set a sign to stop violent clashes and police harassments that had been going on for two days, see HRW 2014: 54-55), is documented in a recent HRW report, which has been rejected as unfounded by government officials.²⁸ One female market seller told HRW: “Police came inside the town’s central market and told everyone to pack and leave. We didn’t know why. They set tear gas to disperse the market. I was here, and the gas hurt my eyes. At first I refused to leave. If you look, you can see holes in the ceiling from where the police shot [bullet holes still visible]. We then had to leave because of the tear gas, and we couldn’t take our things. We lost our produce, and our earnings, and we ran home to our houses. The police shot outside our houses to intimidate us” (HRW 2014: 52).

For many affected people in Sierra Leone, the OSD’s involvement confirms that “their own” authorities are not on their side but rather on the side of foreign investors – or, as the authorities themselves would have it, on the side of development. “Development”, in this context, implies less a path towards individual and collective betterment but rather a disciplinary concept that serves to denounce many people’s livelihoods, their (involuntary) standards of non-education (in terms of formal schooling), and grievances as backwards, objectionable, and

ultimately as harmful to the countries development prospects – without offering them a way out. At the same time, the so denounced are confronted with public education campaigns urging them to change their ways and become useful and employable citizens. For example, during a workshop held by the Attitudinal and Behavioral Change Secretariat (a government agency) in 2013, its executive director, “called for a standard transformation in the attitude of the youth by transforming themselves and cultivating a culture of hard work, commitment and devotion to self-improvement and motivation: ‘If you do not work towards prosperity you will not achieve it, there is dignity in labour and one should expect after labour, we should have positive attitude and strive for excellence to acquire the required skills that will make you useful and employable,’ he said” (Bangura 2013). And National Youth Commissioner Anthony Koroma added, “The youth must be prepared to learn as there is no alternative to education. They should focus their attitude on achieving the ‘Agenda for Prosperity’ [the title and motto of the current Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper] and help the president achieve his dreams of making Sierra Leone a middle level income nation by 2035” (Bangura 2013). Given the condition of the education system, the lack of job opportunities, and the frustrating hardships of everyday life and survival in Sierra Leone, one is left to wonder how Sierra Leoneans are to achieve such self-optimization.

In terms of security, “development” furthermore implies that those who do not live up to its imperatives and standards cannot necessarily count on the state’s protection – especially when they express discontent. Ironically, establishing capacities to defend a development-oriented state was exactly the rationale behind reforming, training, and arming the OSD over the course of the largely DFID-led and financed security sector reforms of the late 1990s and early 2000s (see Krogstadt 2012: 274-278). As Erlend Grøner Krogstadt puts it in his analysis of the intertwined development and security logics that inspired the security sector reform processes, “At the base of this assemblage is a conflicted notion of statehood in which force is simultaneously the problem and the solution – what stifles development, but also what enables it” (Krogstadt 2012: 278). The problematic side has already become apparent, at least if one understands development as also encompassing protest and resistance against practices that are immediately experienced as harmful and exploitative and as not contributing to betterment.

²⁸ The HRW report confirms findings by the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL), an independent human rights institution created by an act of parliament in 2004. The Commission published its assessment of the Bumbuna “incident” in 2012, stating that, “The events of the 16th to 18th April 2012 in Bumbuna were a stark reminder that peace cannot be taken for granted. People had to flee their homes in search of safety while others had to endure the pain of bodily injuries. Others suffered fear that these events were a sign that the old dark days of the war can return at any time. People lost property and had their homes vandalized” (HRCSL 2012: v).

6. CONCLUSION

In spite of high hopes it remains far from certain that FDI – especially in its current form and given the lack of binding and effective protective measures for local people and communities – will eventually deliver overall net development benefits to most Sierra Leoneans. What has already become apparent, however, is that the immediately felt impacts of FDI and related large-scale land deals often not only constitute no tangible improvement but have made everyday life and survival even more difficult for affected people and communities. In consequence, “development” has often been a disappointing experience in Sierra Leone.

Taking this disappointment seriously does not only offer a disconcerting perspective into the uncertainties and ambiguities of FDI-driven “development” in Sierra Leone; it can also help to make sense of the mistrust and alienation that has become painfully apparent during the current Ebola epidemic (see also Menzel 2014). By now, anyone following the Western media coverage on Ebola has heard of Sierra Leoneans’ alienation from their authorities and the mistrust that has also extended to Western health workers. Both have too often (though certainly not exclusively, see e.g. Mogelson 2015) been depicted via the trope of the “ignorant local” who does not adopt “sensible” measures to prevent infection and may not even believe that Ebola “is real”. However, as Susan Shepler, an anthropologist with long experience in Sierra Leone, recently pointed out: “People’s apprehensions [...] come from experience, not from ignorance” (Shepler 2014). And experience has taught Sierra Leoneans not to place blind trust into measures and programs that national and local authorities as well as international actors promote as putting them on the road to betterment.

Still, while I am writing this conclusion, it looks as if Sierra Leoneans are finding ways to fight the epidemic: complying with Ebola emergency laws when they can; trusting their authorities and international missions, NGOs, and agencies as much as they deem reasonable and practicable; making use of offered services where and when they are available; and struggling with food shortages, fear, loss, and not least “normal” sicknesses (Typhoid, Malaria etc.) while still holding on to hopes for better

times.²⁹ President Koroma certainly delivered an adequate description during his speech at the 2009 London Trade and Investment Forum, when he claimed that, “We are a people of limited means but of unlimited ambition. It is time to join us in fulfilling that ambition. It is time to think differently about Sierra Leone.” (Koroma 2009)

29 For some hopeful perspectives see the blog by Susan Shepler and Nina Yamanis on their recent field research in Freetown (Shepler/Yamanis 2015).

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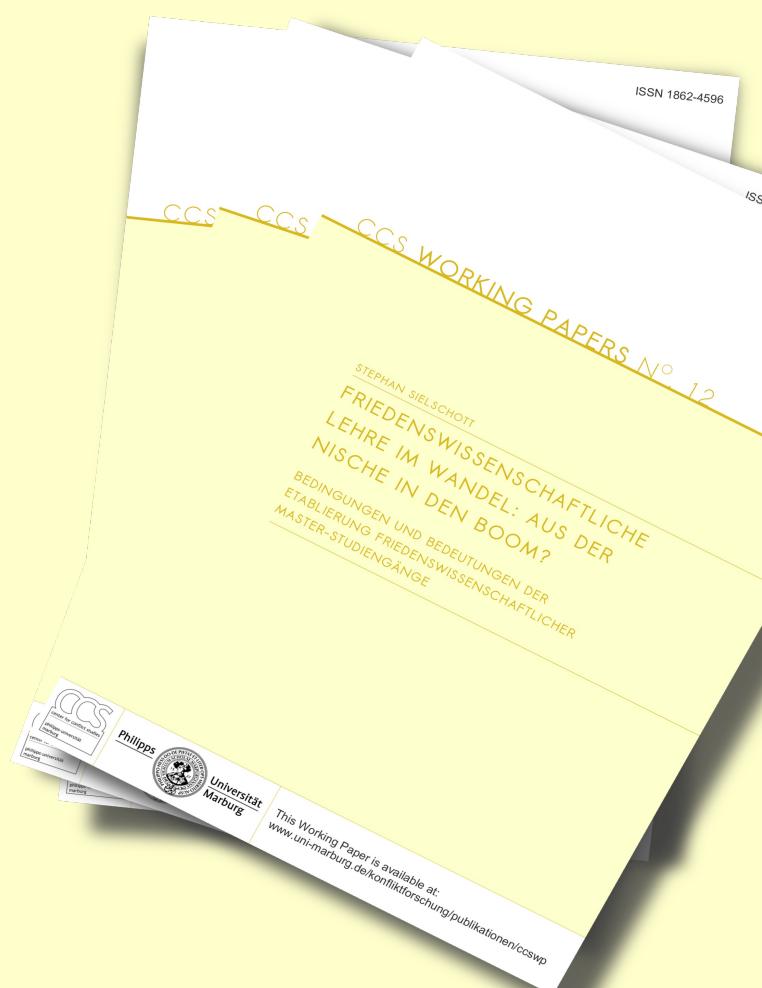
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Zentrum für Konfliktforschung
Philipps-Universität Marburg
Ketzerbach 11
35032 Marburg/Lahn
konflikt@staff.uni-marburg.de
www.uni-marburg.de/konfliktforschung