

**Peacebuilding Commission**  
**Sierra Leone Informal Country-Specific Meeting**  
**Discussion on Youth Employment and Empowerment**

**May 21 2007**

***Summary Note of the Chair***

**I. Introduction**

1. The **primary purpose** of this informal thematic meeting was to inform the Peacebuilding Commission about the challenges in addressing youth employment and empowerment issues in Sierra Leone. The meeting was also designed to contribute to the drafting of the Integrated Peacebuilding Framework or a Compact for Sierra Leone.
2. The meeting was **chaired by H.E. Frank Majoor, Permanent Representative of the Netherlands**. In his opening remarks Ambassador Majoor noted that youth employment and empowerment has been identified by the government of Sierra Leone and the PBC as a priority issue for peace consolidation. It will also be a critical component of the Sierra Leone Framework for Cooperation/Compact with the PBC. He stressed that it is a **difficult but important** issue requiring both short-term quick-impact responses and longer-term solutions.
3. The Government of Sierra Leone was represented by **H.E. Dr. Denis Bright, the Minister of Youth and Sports**. Minister Bright noted that economic marginalization and political exclusion of youth was identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as one of the root causes of the civil war and is widely perceived to be a threat to peace consolidation today. He also provided an update on the recent initiatives of the GoSL in addressing the challenges of youth unemployment such as the Youth Employment Scheme launched by the government in 2006 with the aim of generating up to 135,000 short-term jobs for young people and the National Youth Policy developed in 2003. In addition a National Steering Committee on Youth Employment has been established to coordinate these initiatives by bringing together the various ministries of the government of Sierra Leone, its international partners and members of civil society.
4. In addition to the representatives of the government **other speakers** participating from Sierra Leone included: Engilbert Egudmundsson, World Bank Country Manager Sierra Leone; Joseph Koroma, Head of UNIDO in Sierra Leone; Bernard Mokam, UNDP Sierra Leone Country Director. Discussants in New York included: Alfredo Lazarte, Director of ILO International Crisis Response and Reconstruction; Pia Peeters, World Bank Africa Team, and Remco van Wijngaardes, Senior Policy Advisor, BCPR, UNDP.
5. The May 2007 World Bank Study on Youth Employment in Sierra Leone was the primary background note for the meeting.

## II. Discussion

6. The government of Sierra Leone **defines youth as persons between 15-35 years**, which is estimated to be approximately two million people out of a total population of about five million. The categorization of youth is extended up to 35 years of age in order to capture the population which was most severely affected by the eleven year civil war. Close to **two-thirds of young people are considered unemployed or under-employed**. The unemployment rates are highest among the urban youth and in particular among urban male youths. Young people also tend to have less paid employment, fewer opportunities in the public sector and are often underpaid.

7. All participants stressed that short-term employment generation programs such as public works initiatives need to be linked to long term initiatives and policy and institutional reforms. It was noted that in the long-term significant financial investment, policy and institutional changes, and a focus on education, would be needed to ensure sustained economic recovery and job creation. A number of participants also noted the need to look at community and local level initiatives for employment and further explore the potential of non-traditional agriculture and tourism.

8. The challenge of addressing unemployment in Sierra Leone is closely linked to the creation of **long-term economic growth** and an enabling environment for **private sector development and foreign investment**. A number of preconditions such as improved availability of electricity, water and other basic infrastructure, good governance and anti-corruption measures as well as support for entrepreneurs and self-employed need to be addressed in this context. Youth face additional constraints for employment such as limited access to land, social capital and micro-credit.

9. A number of participants stressed the importance of addressing the problem of youth unemployment in Sierra Leone in a **sub-regional context**. UNDP, ILO and UNIDO among others are involved in strengthening sub-regional employment generation initiatives in particular through the Mano River Union. However, it was noted that additional efforts are needed to build the capacity of the Mano River Union Secretariat.

10. Even though there is **no comprehensive assessment** of youth employment initiatives in Sierra Leone, **a number of lessons** from other experiences were shared at the meeting. The World Bank study in particular notes that training programs for young entrepreneurs and self-employed people have high failure rates and that traditional training programs tend to be more costly and less efficient. Comprehensive programs which include education equivalency training are more successful and strengthening traditional apprenticeship programs is cost effective in the long term.

## III. Next Steps and Recommendations

12. A number of **recommendations** were suggested for the PBC's consideration such as:

- Coordination, prioritization and reallocation should be seen as critical to generating sustainable employment opportunities in a resource-constrained environment such as Sierra Leone
- Short-term quick-impact projects need to be linked to longer-term efforts such as policy and institutional reform and economic recovery
- Focus should be placed on economic not social approaches to addressing youth unemployment
- Private sector development and support for current employers through infrastructure development, access to credit and training of staff need to be key components of employment generation efforts
- Labor market bottlenecks especially in the agricultural sector need to be reviewed and addressed
- Public works schemes should be linked to sustainable projects and contribute to overall re-energizing of the economy and the development of infrastructure
- The National Steering Committee and the Ministry of Youth need to have adequate capacity to address issues of coordination and prioritization as well as policy and institutional reforms needed for sustainable employment and empowerment of youth
- Education programs such as “second chance” and investing in future youth should be prioritized both in the medium and longer term activities
- In the long term the concept of youth would need to be narrowed to allow for more targeted programming and policy formulation
- A comprehensive mapping of existing programs needs to be undertaken in close collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports in order to identify which programs are successful and can be replicated and scaled up. (UNDP is already engaged in the mapping of UN programs)

13. At the end of the meeting, it was agreed that the Chair will produce a summary note elements of which could be considered for the Sierra Leone Compact.

## **Annex I. Participants in Freetown, Sierra Leone**

### **I. Government**

Hon. Dr. Denis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports

### **II. International Partners**

Mr. Claus Ferrer, European Commission Delegation, Sierra Leone

H.E. Mr. Cheng Wenju, Ambassador, China

Mr. Cheng Yan, Chinese Embassy

Mr. Mokowa Blay Aou-Gyamfi, Ghana High Commission

H.E. Mr. Dembom M. Badjie, Gambia High Commission

Mr. Martin Schwarz, German Embassy

Mr. Engilbert Gudmundsson, World Bank

Mr. Diallo Rougue, Guinea Embassy

Ms. Salva Nour, GTZ

Ms. Jane Hobson, DFID

### **III. Civil Society Organizations**

Mr. Anrew Lavali, ENCISS

Mr. Edward Jambala, WANEP/Sierra Leone

Mr. Alpha Sankoh, ACTION AID/SL

Ms. Martha Harding, ACTION AID, SL

Mr. Amani M'Bale, Care International

### **IV. United Nations**

Mr. Gebremedhin Haggos, Chief, Peace and Governance Section, UNIOSIL

Mr. Bernard Mokam, UNDP Country Director

Mr. Joseph Koroma, UNIODO

Mr. Nega Berhanemeskel, UNIOSIL

Mr. Israel Jigba, UNIOSIL

Ms. Harnik Deol, UNIOSIL

Mr. Wahab Shaw, UNDP