

Reconstructing Trust in Sierra Leone

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ABSTRACT In 2004, Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission reported that building public trust in Sierra Leone's post-conflict government and political system was a precondition for development in all sectors of society. This article assesses progress in this venture, and finds that problems of deep distrust continue to pervade all levels of socio-political interaction in Sierra Leone. Nevertheless, the manner in which political trust is conceptualised in Sierra Leone is changing as traditional inequitable systems of patronage are gradually rejected. Noting this trend, it is a central argument of this article that the channelling of prevailing political cynicism into mechanisms of accountability, combined with the earning of public trust by exemplary political leaders, represents the most effective way to reconstruct trust in government, the political system, and throughout Sierra Leone in general.

KEY WORDS: Sierra Leone, Governance , Trust

Trust in government leads to respect for the political system. Respect for the political system ensures stability. Stability is a precondition for development in all sectors of society. Trust in government has to be earned by government and, in particular, by the leaders of government.ⁱ

(*Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2004*)

I don't trust anyone. The government have failed in all the promises they said they were going to do for us. We have seen nothing. They can say anything to get in power, but as soon as they get in power, they forget about us.ⁱⁱ

(*David, security guard, Freetown, January 2009*)

If the leaders change their behaviour, if they change their ways, everything will be fine. Because we have diamonds, we have gold, we have everything.ⁱⁱⁱ

(*Mohamed, ex-combatant taxi-driver, Freetown, January 2009*)

Introduction

In 2004, Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) published its final report on the causes and consequences of the 1991-2002 civil conflict. It showed that many driving forces of conflict related to a prior break down of trust; both with regard to popular disillusionment with traditional political mechanisms and state institutions, and with regard to a deep social schism between Sierra Leone's youth and older generations. If these issues played a part in fostering conflict, conflict itself served to further undermine trust across all levels, leading the TRC to conclude that trust-building remained central to the overall project of rebuilding Sierra Leone:

There is very little trust in leadership [...] This breakdown in the relationship between citizen and state does not bode well for the future. People's spirits have been broken by the horrors they endured during the conflict. The leaders should urgently address this lack of trust, for it can only be a source of further strife and unrest.^{iv}

Now, seven years after conflict, five years after the TRC's findings, and more than a year after landmark national elections, is Sierra Leone in a better situation? Building on fieldwork conducted between September 2008 - March 2009, this article shows that Sierra Leone continues to suffer from deep problems of distrust.¹ Pervasive corruption, lack of economic development and a failure to deliver on election promises continue to promulgate deep political cynicism towards government and

ⁱ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final Report*, Vol.2, Ch.3, item 212.

ⁱⁱ Interview, Freetown, 22 January 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ Interview, Freetown, 27 January 2009.

^{iv} Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final Report*, Vol.2, Ch.4, item 48.

political leaders. Yet the question of trust goes beyond the simple matter of relations between citizen and state. Those interviewed identified issues of trust on a fundamental interpersonal level, commonly linked to perceived 'bad' attitudes among others and the proclivity of individuals to place money before duty and fair-play. Past examples of betrayal, disappointment or injustice, accompanied the conviction that ultimately, 'to trust is foolish.'^v

Trust, in this article, follows the definition commonly provided by those interviewed; a faith in individuals or institutions to meet obligations and, more negatively, to avoid betrayal. This conception was strongly shaped by traditional systems of socio-political interaction in which powerful patrons controlled capital. Trust focussed upon individuals over and above institutions; family and community networks were deemed significant, although in decline. Informal networks were blamed for undermining trust by promoting corruption and nepotism, excluding many Sierra Leoneans and eroding public confidence in the equal distribution of opportunities and national resources. Post-conflict efforts to counter corruption meant such networks were also increasingly unreliable for those who traditionally reaped their benefit. These findings supported an International Crisis Group (ICG) report which partly saw 2007 elections as 'a mass vote for better governance and service delivery over the failed promises of patronage.'^{vi} As traditional patronage networks and community ties were seen to decline, more cautiously individualistic formulations and investments of trust had grown; confidence could only be invested on an individual-to-individual basis, and only once an individual had proven their commitment to fulfil promises and act with integrity.

Despite the proliferation of political cynicism and a negative perception of popular attitudes, this article finds that recent political developments offer hope for change. In particular, the promotion of political accountability, combined with leader's commitments to actively earn public confidence, serves to deconstruct traditional inequitable patrimonial systems, paving the way for the reconstruction of trust across all levels of socio-political interaction.

^v Interview with security guard, aged 21. Freetown, 28 January 2009. This statement was echoed frequently in interviews.

^{vi} ICG, *A New Era of Reform?* p6. See also Ch. II, pp5-8, 'The Decline of Patronage?'

The Development of Distrust

The situation in Sierra Leone is inextricably linked with long-established informal systems of governance and social interaction. From the earliest days of colonial government, political authority and trade relied upon a patrimonial system in which Freetown-based political patrons operated within elite socio-economic networks, alienating much of the rural provincial population.² Following independence in 1961, nepotism and corruption within a growing shadow state and fenced-off economy further undermined trust in the formal organs of state. As political elites exercised power for private gain in both local and national government, the wider development of the country stalled and the majority of the population became politically and economically marginalised.

Trust in the formal political system was further undermined in the 1970s and 1980s as Sierra Leone slipped into a one-party system of government and President Siaka Stevens moved to suppress political opposition. As student protests were quashed and the dominance of local chiefs reinforced, youth became increasingly marginalised and disillusioned with traditional modes of government.³ Whilst the official state was failing them, the informal state, built upon patronage networks, was excluding them.

It was precisely such disillusionment and break down of trust in leaders that the TRC identified as key to rendering Sierra Leone vulnerable to conflict in 1991, yet the conflict itself served to further undermine bonds of trust within Sierra Leonean society. Older generations came to fear and distrust youth, who were believed to be the driving force of rebellion, whilst many fighting for the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) or the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) felt betrayed by an unsupportive civilian population.⁴ Confidence in government was undermined by the inability of leaders to mount an effective counter-offence to the RUF, whilst repeated military coups served to erode confidence in the salience of democracy. Coups also led civilians to treat military forces with suspicion, a problem compounded by the perceived collusion of the army with rebels, epitomised by the term ‘sobel’ – soldier by day, rebel by night.⁵ With the blurring of lines of division between supposedly

opposing forces, and consistent abuses against civilians by all sides, the war in Sierra Leone established a logic whereby it became a matter of self-survival to be distrustful.

Same Car, Different Driver?

With the end of conflict in 2002, success in reintegrating ex-combatants into wider society appears to have been considerable. This owes much to a reconciliatory attitude among the population and fighting factions, with most wishing to put the conflict behind them and focus on the future. The desire of many former RUF to distance themselves from their 'rebel' identity has also facilitated their acceptance into communities.⁶ Yet perhaps the most important reason for the relative ease with which factions returned to wider society relates to the root causes of the war; conflict was not driven by deeply entrenched ethnic, political, or regional divides. Rather, the stated grievances for which many combatants claimed to be fighting were also held by the victims of violence and those pushing for peace. Hence, the integration of ex-combatants and their reconciliation with each other and the wider community has in many respects represented a far easier task than that faced in many other civil wars. Nevertheless, precisely those same grievances which have united Sierra Leoneans continue to foster broader problems of political distrust. Commonly-held feelings of disillusionment and frustration with government and leaders, seen as instrumental to nurturing conflict, have survived conflict.

Many of those interviewed expressed dismay at the post-conflict return of the same distrusted political elites and abusive practices that had led to war. Anger over broken electoral promises was tangible, as was a feeling among ex-combatants that promised dividends of peace had not materialised.⁷ A common belief that little had changed since the end of the conflict was not entirely unjustified; Sierra Leone remained rooted to the foot of the UN Human Development Index, suffering high unemployment levels and lacking the most basic infrastructure required for significant economic development. Corruption at all levels remained rife, and the traditional informal mechanisms of business and politics continued to hold primacy. Individuals commonly reported that to make gains in life required knowing people of

influence or relying on the assistance of connected family members; personal skills and merit were deemed largely irrelevant. After two successive elections since the war, it was therefore not surprising that many Sierra Leoneans remained deeply cynical towards political leaders. David, a young security guard in Freetown, voiced a commonly held view:

You can be trusted now, but when you enter into politics, you don't have any trust. It is like we say in Krio, 'politricks', because you can trick the people so that you can sit at the right position. But when you sit in that chair, you betray the people.^{vii}

A frequently expressed view was that politicians sought to profit from office, rather than serve the people; even for those few who might hold good intentions, it was believed that the corrupting influence of wealth would inevitably lead them to neglect their duties:

The moment they sit on that chair, the moment they swear them in, the moment they give them that position as minister, it is finished.^{viii}

When they enter into power, they always neglect people. They don't want to see the people. When they get the money they send their families overseas to go and learn there and sit there. They build a mighty house, buy cars, live a luxurious life, while the people are suffering.^{ix}

The 2007 elections were seen as an opportunity to counter such cynicism and build faith in the political system, and in many key aspects there were positive signs for this endeavour. Following a high voter turn-out, the incumbent Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) lost the election to the All People's Congress (APC), a result many saw as a response to the SLPP's failure to deliver promised change. Despite spates of electoral violence in the run-up to a second round of voting, power was transferred peacefully under the successful guidance of Sierra Leone's own National Electoral Commission (NEC) and the national police force. The APC's Ernest Bai Koroma, elected on a youth and anti-corruption ticket, assumed office vowing to bring tangible change.

^{vii} Interview, Freetown, 22 January 2009.

^{viii} Interview with Joseph, driver for a development agency, Freetown, 27 January 2009.

^{ix} Interview with Musa, taxi driver, Freetown, 30 January 2009.

Nevertheless, more than a year after the APC assumed power, progress in building trust appears to have been severely limited. Prior to the 2007 election, a survey by the BBC World Service Trust and Search for Common Ground found that many Sierra Leoneans felt there was little difference between the parties, and that the democratic system in practice offered very little choice in terms of policy.^x In early 2009, cynicism towards the parties reflected the same sentiment:

All the parties are the same. The SLPP, the PMDC, the APC, they are the same. The same people in SLPP, you can see them in APC. The same people in APC, you can see them in PMDC. That is why I say it is 'politricks'. They play a trick on people so that they can get their own money.^{xi}

Whilst the reversal of such attitudes cannot be expected overnight, a number of developments during and after the 2007 elections can be seen as partly responsible for their prevalence.

First, a real sense that election promises have not been honoured has served to foster deep resentment towards government. For many, the change in government represented a last gamble, and hopes among youths and ex-combatants for an improved lot were particularly high.⁸ Nevertheless, most find themselves in the same situation as before; new employment opportunities have not materialised, and youth-empowerment initiatives remain stalled at the starting blocks. This perceived continuity of stagnation has done much to reinforce the idea of 'same car, different driver.'

Second, the elections themselves saw the return of past abusive political practices and the development of a highly confrontational political atmosphere, both of which served to undermine trust.⁹ Incidents of corruption were reported; 'votes for sale' took on a highly visible presence as voters queued outside candidate's homes to receive their payments.¹⁰ Rival politicians, and most notably, the rival presidential candidates, accused their opponents of seeking to rig the election or intimidate the

^x BBC World Service Trust and Search for Common Ground, *Sierra Leone Elections 2007*, pp19-20.

^{xi} Interview with security guard, Freetown, 22 January 2009.

electorate. At one juncture, departing president Ahmed Tejan Kabbah threatened to impose a state of emergency in the country unless party supporters desisted from violent acts, and APC leader Ernest Bai Koroma was forced to abandon campaigning in the south.^{xii} Such was the level of distrust between parties that Kabbah was unable to bring the contending candidates together for a joint rally calling for peaceful electioneering.

The involvement of former combatants in the private security arrangements of political parties also spoke volumes about trust during the elections. Ex-combatants themselves believed they had been called upon by the parties because politicians could not trust the police or army.^{xiii} Political leaders claimed that party militias were a necessary defensive measure against the physical intimidation practiced by opponents.¹¹ Following elections, party militias continued to be involved in acts of political violence.¹² The reconnection of ex-combatants to violence through the very operation of the democratic system represented a worrying mirror of political abuses common under the pre-conflict Siaka Stevens regime. Again, this has reinforced the notion of ‘same car, different driver.’

Finally, the risk that parties, and political life in Sierra Leone in general, exacerbate regional divisions was partly realised during the 2007 elections. Although the emergence of a third party, the People’s Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC), served to bring many traditionally SLPP Mende voters to the Temne-reliant APC, the difficulties encountered by the APC in campaigning in parts of the south betrayed the fact that Sierra Leone remained regionally divided.¹³ Since elections, the PMDC has floundered and its support is expected to swing back to the SLPP. Furthermore, President Koroma, in keeping with past administrations, has moved to fill government with appointments from his northern support-base, raising fears that Sierra Leone will again see a situation in which Freetown’s ruling elite is disconnected from, and distrusted by, the largely Mende areas of the rural South and

^{xii} BBC, *Emergency Threat in Sierra Leone*, 28 August 2007, BBC News Online, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6966339.stm> ; IRIN, *Sierra Leone: Election tensions could help or hinder democratic process*, Freetown, 29 August 2007, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=73994>.

^{xiii} See Utas & Christensen, *Mercenaries of Democracy*, p7.

East.^{xiv} The rise of regionalism in party political interaction has therefore served to reinvigorate old problems of distrust.

Reconstructing Trust

Despite problems encountered during the 2007 elections, the eventual peaceful transfer of power and change in government represented a victory for the democratic vote. Many of those interviewed who voted APC, often for the first time, expressed hope in President Koroma, and most agreed he had entered office with genuine conviction to bring change for the people. Nevertheless, few expected the President to achieve this aim. It was felt that Sierra Leone's history showed the trappings of power ultimately corrupted all leaders, and that those surrounding the president would obstruct his progress. Mariama, an APC supporter, stated:

For the President, we are praying that he will have more trust in his heart. But for the ministers, most of them are not trustworthy. Even the people in the country are not trustworthy.^{xv}

That 'the people' were not trustworthy, Mariama explained, referred to the unreliable attitude of ordinary Sierra Leoneans, a criticism often voiced in interviews. In this respect the concept of corruption was often applied not solely to the workings of systems and institutions but to character, both a perceived national character and the attitude of individuals.¹⁴ The question of trust, therefore, ran deeper than a simple matter of faith in politicians and government, as the comments of Joseph, a driver for a development agency, showed:

I don't trust anybody. No friends, no family. Nobody. I trust myself. In this country, people don't trust people because of so many things. Business, money – people betray people for money, people kill people for position. So how can you trust people?^{xvi}

^{xiv} International Crisis Group, *Sierra Leone: A New Era of Reform?* pp11-12

^{xv} Interview, Freetown, 30 January 2009.

^{xvi} Interview, Freetown, 29 January 2009. Whilst others expressed some trust in close family, virtually all believed friends would betray them for money and they could only truly rely upon themselves.

Many of those interviewed gave a series of examples from their own lives in which they had been 'betrayed' by colleagues, friends and family, usually in connection to money. Individuals cited day-to-day experiences of corruption and nepotism in seeking employment, the non-payment of wages, the breaking of contracts and the collusion of police officers with criminals. Given such experiences, individuals explained their reluctance to hold faith in political leaders as a simple matter of common sense. A sentiment of 'We don't trust ourselves, so how can we trust in democracy' was similarly noted by Utas and Christensen.^{xvii}

If the problem of distrust is as endemic as many Sierra Leoneans believe, then the question remains as to how political leaders can tackle such a seemingly impossible task as rebuilding trust in government, as prescribed by the TRC. Two approaches offer real hope in this regard.

First, the statement of the TRC chairman points towards the most straightforward solution to problems of distrust:

The leadership must know that the trust and confidence of the people is not automatic; it is earned through honesty and lost through corruption and greed.^{xviii}

Quite simply, trust in government and political leaders can be built in Sierra Leone through the example of competent individuals in public office. The importance of public examples of leaders resistant to corruption and dedicated to serving the people was highlighted in interviews as the only way to bring real change in attitudes across all levels of social interaction in Sierra Leone. If even one or two public figures were able to earn the trust of the people, it was suggested, the impact on self-perceptions across the country would be significant.

The impact that individual examples can make should not be underestimated, as evidenced by case of NEC Commissioner Christiana Thorpe.¹⁵ Recognised internationally for her determination and integrity during the 2007 elections, many of those interviewed explained their confidence in the vote and their power to change

^{xvii} Utas & Christensen, *Mercenaries of Democracy*, p22.

^{xviii} Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final Report*, Vol.3B, Ch.8, *My National Vision for Sierra Leone: A Renaissance Sierra Leone*, by Bishop Joseph C. Humper..

government as stemming in large part from their confidence in Commissioner Thorpe:

We know the person that's holding the position, she is trustworthy. People have worked with her, she has a respect for herself.^{xix}

If the woman [Christiana Thorpe] is here still, everything will be fine. For that particular woman, for every election that she is going to be conducting, it is going to be fine.^{xx}

Second, trust-building in government (and indeed, elections) cannot rely solely on the emergence of good leaders. For one, this would risk people investing trust solely in individuals rather than the system as a whole. Therefore, the development and reinforcement of accountability mechanisms and systems of regulation would in itself serve to reward and encourage sound leadership and build faith in the political system. This allows for a practical implementation of attitudinal change, a project which otherwise remains abstract and difficult to measure progress upon.¹⁶

In the formal political arena, the casting of votes of no confidence has built confidence in the vote, reinforcing the determination of the electorate to hold leaders to account. Indeed, despite an insistence that government and political leaders could not be trusted, those interviewed clearly held confidence their votes could bring about a change in government, punishing those who had failed to deliver on promises:

You cannot betray me, and then when the next election comes, you tell me to vote for you. No, I cannot vote for you. I will vote for another person, so I can watch him.^{xxi}

They cannot say a lot of things in a conference, or when they meet the people, saying that when I become a minister I will bring a project that has a lot of jobs. Then when you see them in the chair, there is no project, and no jobs. What do you want the people to say? That bad man, we vote for him, and now he's sitting on that chair treating us like slaves. Don't worry, the next election, he will not sit on that chair.^{xxii}

^{xix} Interview with ex-combatant, Freetown, 28 January 2009.

^{xx} Interview with security guard, Freetown, 23 January 2009.

^{xxi} Interview with ex-combatant, Kenema, 13 September 2008.

^{xxii} Interview with security guard, Freetown, 23 January 2009.

This confidence in the power of the vote contrasts sharply with the state of affairs under the pre-war one-party system. So too does the attendant level of political awareness among Sierra Leoneans, particularly youth, which serves to ensure the actions of leaders and government receives public scrutiny. Indeed, some have commented that a positive outcome of the conflict was the political education of the people; citizens have developed a sense of rights and entitlement, and the resolve that things must change.^{xxiii} Even apparent incidents of ‘votes for sale’ in the 2007 election reflected this new attitude; many who collected money for casting their ballot actually voted for their patron’s opponent.¹⁷ The tables had been turned on the politicians.

The use of the vote in this way represents the incorporation of public distrust into the political system. Sierra Leoneans no longer have to simply hope that ministers will fulfil their obligations; they are increasingly able to trust the democratic system to punish them if they do not. Beyond the formal mechanisms of the democratic system, checks and balances are also developing in the guise of public protest and political lobbying. A pertinent example was a move by Sierra Leonean youth groups in January 2009 to pressure the government into reviving the establishment of a National Youth Commission, a body proposed as early as 2003 and promised in the 2007 election campaign.¹⁸ After lobbying ministers with little success, the National Youth Coalition (NYC) gave the government a forty-five day ultimatum to respond before it established its own parallel commission. Press conferences bringing the issue to public attention were held. This move generated significant media coverage, and the President himself was forced to intervene in the matter.¹⁹ As an act of monitoring and regulation, this incident demonstrated government could not afford to ignore political protest and that ministers were not simply being trusted to deliver promises, they were being actively compelled.

Through these formal and informal mechanisms of political accountability, the traditional patrimonial method of government, largely based on the bypassing of public sentiment, is being replaced by a rational-legalistic model, whereby the

^{xxiii} This sentiment was widely expressed, including by a UNDP youth programme officer in Freetown, 10 September 2008; a Member of Parliament in Freetown, 11 September 2008; a group of ex-combatants in Kenema, 13 September 2008, and the head of a youth empowerment NGO in Freetown, 29 January 2009.

regulatory power of the system renders government dependent on public trust. No more clearly is this formalising trend illustrated than in the decision by President Koroma, following his 2007 electoral victory, to have ministers sign performance contracts, setting targets which if not met, would result in their removal from office.

Conclusion

The issue of trust lies at the heart of Sierra Leone's future development. Seven years after the conflict, cynicism towards government and leaders remains high, and the belief that all Sierra Leoneans need to change 'bad attitudes' is commonplace. However, although the task given to political leaders of building trust in government is daunting, it is not insurmountable; indeed there exist signs that a transformation is taking place in the way political trust itself is understood. Traditional exclusionary systems of patrimony, where trust is placed in the power of money and the patronage of friends and family, are gradually being eroded by a trust in rational-legalistic frameworks. This process will gain momentum if political cynicism continues to be channelled positively through its incorporation into mechanisms of regulation and accountability. Increasing confidence in the power of the vote and political protest are steps in building such mechanisms and an associated trust in government. Greater public oversight of government and the ability of Sierra Leoneans to hold politicians to account will further serve to encourage the emergence of political leaders capable of earning public trust. Ultimately, it is the example of such leaders that can do most to transform attitudes and build trust across Sierra Leone.

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Notes

¹ This article is informed by interviews carried out between September 2008 and March 2009 in Bo, Freetown, Kailahun, Kenema and Makeni. Those interviewed represent a cross-section of Sierra Leonean society, ranging from unemployed ex-combatants to senior political figures in both urban and rural areas. International donor, NGO and UN staff were also interviewed extensively. Reflecting the demographics of Sierra Leone, the majority of those interviewed were below the age of 35. To protect the identity of those interviewed, names have been changed.

² The TRC noted that colonialists used ‘commerce, Christianity and notions of ‘civilisation’ to ‘manipulate the relationships among the indigenous peoples’, sowing ‘seeds of distrust, competition and intransigence’ within the country. Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final Report*, Vol.3A, Ch.1, item 10.

³ See Richards, *Fighting for the Rainforest*.

⁴ See Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*.

⁵ For an overview of problems of distrust caused by blurred lines of division, see Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*.

⁶ The reintegration element of the official DDR programme in Sierra Leone was severely flawed. However, through informal social-processes, most ex-combatants have successfully reintegrated. See Humphreys & Weinstein, *What the Fighters Say*.

⁷ A youth officer working with young men in East Freetown commented that although former RUF could not be easily identified in the streets, ‘whenever there is a commotion, these boys are the angriest and you will see it, because they are all very, very angry inside. They feel betrayed.’ Interview, Freetown, 29 January 2009.

⁸ In most interviews, expectations of what the new government could deliver appeared unrealistic, at least in the short-term. This underlines the importance of managing expectations, and in so doing, managing trust. For many, it was election promises made during the 2007 campaign that had misled them over the capacity of government.

⁹ See Mitton, *Engaging Disengagement*.

¹⁰ See Utas, *Watermelon Politics in Sierra Leone*.

¹¹ One senior political figure saw recruitment of militias as an integral part of safeguarding democracy. Interview, Kenema, 14 September 2008.

¹² In March 2009, the SLPP headquarters were violently ransacked by APC supporters, catching international media attention and sparking fears of escalation.

¹³ The APC has traditionally drawn support from the northern Temne regions; the South and East are predominantly Mende and remain SLPP heartlands. In the 2007 second round of voting, Charles Margai, former SLPP member and leader of the PMDC, encouraged his predominantly Mende supporters to side with the APC, thus bringing a departure from traditional regional voting patterns.

¹⁴ During his inaugural speech, President Koroma recognised corruption as inherently attitudinal: ‘A critical examination of the way of life indicates that corruption lies in our attitudes, and unless we change our attitudes we shall never be able to create the peaceful, progressive and prosperous country we dream about and wish to build.’ *Presidential Inaugural Speech*, Freetown, 15 November 2007.

¹⁵ In what the International Crisis Group, *A New Era of Reform?*, described as ‘a bold and controversial interpretation of the NEC’s statutory powers’, Thorpe invalidated the results of 477 polling stations because they returned more votes than they had registered voters. Virtually all were in the southern SLPP heartlands. It is important to note that Thorpe remains unpopular with some SLLP supporters who blame her for damaging the party’s electoral chances. However, the perceived integrity of her action was cited as reason for the high esteem in which the majority of those interviewed, including SLPP supporters, held her.

¹⁶ President Koroma established an Attitudinal and Behavioural Change (ABC) campaign following his election; the campaign has struggled to move beyond rhetoric to practical measures, and has been criticised for focusing on ordinary Sierra Leoneans rather than ministers themselves. See ICG, *A New Era of Reform?* pp20-21.

¹⁷ Mats Utas rightly views this development as ‘central to Sierra Leone’s democratic progression’. Utas, *Watermelon Politics in Sierra Leone*.

¹⁸ A senior civil servant in the Ministry of Youth, Education and Sports confirmed that significant work on the National Youth Commission had already been undertaken behind the scenes; interview, Freetown, 29 January 2009. Nevertheless, the National Youth Coalition was instrumental in bringing the issue back to the political fore.

¹⁹ The question of trust lay at the heart of events. According to a press release by a coalition of youth groups and youth serving agencies on 7 January 2009, the Minister of Information and Communication had described the NYC as ‘groups of people who are seeking to gain employment for their personal interest rather than the general interest of all youths in the country.’ Some youth leaders likewise felt that ministers could not be trusted to treat youth issues with appropriate concern without the direct intervention of the President. Interview, head of Sierra Leone Youth Employment Organization, Freetown, 29 January 2009.