

Peacebuilding efforts in Sierra Leone must address natural resource governance

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Global Witness urged today both the newly-elected government of Sierra Leone and the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) to include natural resource management in the peacebuilding strategy for the country.^[i]

“Where natural resources have played a role in conflict, they must be considered by the Peacebuilding Commission as a crucial step in ensuring an effective approach to peacebuilding and to help countries avoid relapsing into conflict” says Patrick Alley, Director of Global Witness.

Natural resources were identified in earlier drafts as part of the four key peacebuilding needs prioritised by the government of Sierra Leone. They have since been dropped from the draft of the integrated peacebuilding strategy. This is a worrying omission.

Youth marginalisation, endemic corruption and bad governance were identified as the root causes of Sierra Leone’s civil war. Natural resource exploitation became an economic driver, perpetuating the conflict.

In 2007, Global Witness visited parts of the country historically linked to the conflict and found evidence of a persisting pattern of youth marginalisation and tension linked to enduring corruption and mismanagement of the mineral sector.

In the war-battered diamond district of Kono, communities told Global Witness that they felt marginalised and that their land was being taken away. Despite being a Kimberley Process^[ii] participant since 2003, government controls over diamond areas are weak and poorly enforced and the industry is still characterised by exploitation, poverty and poor working conditions.

The problems identified in Kono are not unique to diamond mining operations; during investigations Global Witness visited other mining areas and found a similar pattern of tension and growing frustration among the communities affected by mining.

“Failure to address these issues could, in the context of the enduring endemic corruption and lack of economic and social development, contribute to undermining the peacebuilding efforts of the government of Sierra Leone, international donors and other stakeholders” added Patrick Alley.

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^[i] Peacebuilding Omission? A submission on the need to integrate natural resource management in the Peacebuilding Commission’s post-conflict reconstruction strategies in Sierra Leone and elsewhere, October 2007. Global Witness is an independent UK-based non-governmental organisation which researches and campaigns on the links between natural resource exploitation, conflict and corruption. All Global Witness publications can be found at www.globalwitness.org. In 2006, the United Nations Security Council referred Sierra Leone as one of two countries to receive the PBC’s attention.

^[ii] The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme is a joint government, international diamond industry and civil society initiative that is designed to certify the origin of diamonds from sources which are free of conflict.