Post-2015 Data Test
country level experiences

Measuring National Priorities for Post-2015 in Sierra Leone
Report Highlights

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About the Study

As the world braces itself for the end of 2015, the target end date for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), governments, development partners and international organisations have queried the *modus operandi* for monitoring progress on the MDGs amidst statistical inadequacy in many developing countries. In 2012, the Rio+20 United Nations (UN) Conference on Sustainable Development conceived of a set of new commitments to replace the MDGs – the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this context, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Carleton University's Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA), in association with Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals, launched the Post-2015 Data Test, an initiative to investigate the feasibility and measurability of the SDGs across low-, middle- and high-income countries.

Keen to support research on the SDGs in Africa, the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGAR) supported the addition of Sierra Leone to the initiative, which already included Senegal and Tanzania, to showcase the statistical capacity of Anglophone West African countries, specifically their capacity to provide adequate, relevant, timely and accurate data to monitor progress on the SDGs.

The Sierra Leone country study examines the relevance of several proposed SDG areas for Sierra Leone and presents the state of statistical data to measure progress on those areas. It evaluates (i) poverty, (ii) education, (iii) employment and inclusive growth, (iv) energy and infrastructure, (v) environmental sustainability and disaster resilience, (vi) governance, and (vii) global partnership for sustainable development. Given that the SDG framework is set to allow for country space in the adoption and implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, the study includes an in-depth analysis of Sierra Leone's national priorities under the seven issue areas. It also evaluates the availability of official data (according to source, type and description of data) required to monitor progress on goals and identifies data gaps.

This report makes a number of valuable contributions. First, the identification of national-level priorities and implications of the SDGs for Sierra Leone will help inform the dialogue on the adoption and adaptation of the SDGs in the country. The report provides insights on potential national-level targets and identifies key challenges and opportunities for implementation of the SDGs. Second, the report identifies data gaps for monitoring progress against national and global SDG priorities. Third, the report catalogues the challenges, inadequacies and efforts in Sierra Leone to collect and disseminate relevant data. It includes a mapping of data sources and an assessment of the accessibility, availability and quality of data. The findings of this report will serve as a guide for policymakers and experts who intend to establish reliable datasets and make evidence-based decisions in Sierra Leone.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Post-2015 Discussions in Sierra Leone

Discussions about the post-2015 agenda have been limited in Sierra Leone, but it would be fair to say that MDG issues have been at the forefront of development discussions in the country since 2009. Civil society organisations (CSOs) are aware of the MDGs and related achievements. They have called for accountability and transparency from the government of Sierra Leone, which has always intimated that national goals and priorities are aligned with the MDGs. In 2008 and 2010, the UN collaborated with the government and civil society to lead a joint mission and produced progress reports on the remaining challenges and MDGs yet to be achieved in Sierra Leone. Regardless, there has not been a framework laid out for the way forward after 2015.

National Priorities

> Poverty, maternal and infant mortality, gender inequality, youth employment and environmental degradation are important priorities for Sierra Leone post-2015. Lack of funding to address these priorities remains a significant challenge.

Since 2002, the government of Sierra Leone has made many attempts to reduce the persisting problems of poverty, maternal and infant mortality and gender inequality. An example is Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) III referred to as the Agenda for Prosperity (Government of Sierra Leone 2013a), which focused on mainstreaming gender as one of its core priorities. The Interim PRSP (Government of Sierra Leone 2001), PRSP I (Government of Sierra Leone 2005a), PRSP II referred to as the Agenda for Change (Government of Sierra Leone 2008) and PRSP III all stressed the need to reduce poverty, secure sustainable employment for youth and address issues of environmental degradation. The issues of poverty reduction, youth employment and decent work (which fall within the theme of productive and remunerative work), youth employability (i.e., skills development), and disaster management and sustainable environmental practices are all part of current thinking and practice encapsulated in PRSP III. These key priorities are also captured under the candidate SDGs.

The Commonwealth Foundation, an intergovernmental organisation based in the United Kingdom, worked with CSOs in Sierra Leone to assess progress towards meeting the MDGs in 2015. Assessments, which took place in 2011 and 2012, covered the issues of poverty, youth unemployment, gender inequality, environment and energy, and infrastructure. Outlined in PRSP III, the assessments' findings are considered to be Sierra Leone's national development blueprint for 2013–18. However, a lack of funding has posed a real challenge for implementation.

Implementation of the SDGs

Sierra Leone has a rich set of sustainable development priorities in place that could be used to inform the implementation of the SDGs at the country level. Looking forward, the government of Sierra Leone will need to focus on diverting funds from ministries, departments and agencies engaged in certain work areas, such as the natural resource sector, towards those that support the social sector. Funding should be allocated to the implementation of strategies on reducing poverty and improving employment, specifically generating awareness about decent work and putting in place mechanisms to reduce youth unemployment. This approach will require the government to focus on education and skills development,

as it will play a key role in solving the long-standing issues of poverty, unemployment and gender inequality.

The National Statistical System

Discussions on the post-2015 agenda have called for reflection on statistical needs within each country. Given the high rate of youth unemployment in Sierra Leone, a priority of the government will be to collect disaggregated data on employment and the country's main economic sectors, including agriculture, mining and infrastructure. Focus should also be on identifying emerging non-traditional labour market activities and environmental issues, such as the area of forest cover removed, reclaiming mined-out areas, and artificial lakes created by rutile mining in Moyamba District. Additionally, the data collection process will need to be refined in order to ensure gender sensitivity, increase the frequency of data collection and shorten the time between data analysis and the dissemination of findings.

Sierra Leone faces significant political, institutional, policy and resource constraints to producing good-quality data. The country's national statistical office, Statistics Sierra Leone (SSL), is not autonomous. Political interference has meant that each government has conducted data collection that serves as a quick win and can be easily funded by the government and development partners. Importantly, CSOs remain dedicated to monitoring Sierra Leone's progress on the MDGs, particularly in the areas of poverty, education and health.

> Sierra Leone faces significant political, institutional, policy and resource constraints to producing good-quality data. Going forward, data collection process will need to be refined in order to ensure gender sensitivity, increase the frequency of data collection and shorten the time between data analysis and the dissemination of findings. Commitment and delivery of pooled funding will be needed from international partners and the government to effectively monitor the SDGs.

At the institutional level, the staff turnover rate at SSL was very high between 2004 and 2013.The attrition rate severely affected the trust of some stakeholders and donors, leading to restricted funding of SSL activities. This lack of resources negatively impacted the frequency of data collection. Following its 1989–90 Labour Force Survey, the government recently completed the follow-up 2014 Labour Force Survey that was intended to collect more accurate data on key labour market indicators. The 2014 Population and Housing Census was postponed indefinitely as a result of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in March of that year.

SSL has been implementing the second National Strategy for Development of Statistics (NSDS) (Government of Sierra Leone 2013c). In a concerted and collaborative approach, the government has been pooling resources from all government entities for data collection under the NSDS. The International Monetary Fund previously carried out the first NSDS in order to assess the country's macroeconomic database. It identified the poor state of institutional capacity and statistical activities within Sierra Leone and subsequently proposed structural reforms, which included restructuring of the national statistical system. The objectives of the reforms were efficient and coordinated data production, client conscientiousness and speedier delivery of quality information to decision- and policy-makers, donors and other users of official statistics (Statistics Sierra Leone 2008, 2–3). The first NSDS suffered from a lack of donor funding for implementation following a sudden change of leadership that disrupted activities at SSL, which led to high attrition of trained staff. The lessons learned were the need to pool resources for statistical activities in the country and the need for collaboration among data users, other stakeholders and SSL.

The second NSDS is seen as a hope for the creation of a national resource pool that enables timely data collection to support all government entities, including line ministries, in a manner that befits the calendar of each year. For example, the resource pool created under the NSDS will include timetables for employers and involve an establishment survey to be undertaken by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. When the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs is ready to conduct a survey on street children and orphans in and out of school, SSL will coordinate both surveys, ensure quality assurance and provide the needed financial and human resources.

Data Availablity and Quality

The dearth of data had been identified for over a decade, yet the government of Sierra Leone has not implemented reforms or enacted laws that would drastically increase the frequency of data collection and shorten the time between data analysis and the dissemination of findings. Various surveys exist, such as the Demographic and Health Survey,[1] Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey,[2] Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey[3] and Population and Housing Census.[4] These surveys, however, are insufficient for measuring progress on the candidate SDGs, particularly for newer goal areas such as those related to the environment, energy, infrastructure, human rights and global partnership for sustainable development. They capture socio-economic indicators, though on an infrequent basis. Further, the potential to create synergies between survey instruments and improve their alignment to fill data gaps has not been realised. Measuring progress on the SDGs will require concerted efforts to collect and report additional information on relevant socio-economic indicators. At the moment, the country awaits the release of the 2014 Labour Force Survey findings.

> Existing survey instruments are insufficient to measure newer SDGs such as those related to the environment, energy, infrastructure, human rights and global partnership for sustainable development. Investments will also be needed to collect more and better data on the labour market. Disaggregated data will also pose a significant challenge across SDGs for Sierra Leone.

Of the 45 indicators examined across the seven goal areas included in this study, Sierra Leone has data for 48.9 percent. Of the indicators which were selected to reflect national priorities under the SDGs, the situation is worse. Data exists for 13 of the 52 indicators examined – or 25 percent. Data for poverty-related indicators tends to be available, however will likely require further manipulation to meet SDG monitoring needs. Data on education are available for school enrolment (by gender and age, by locality and district), the school completion rate, the pass rate in national examinations (disaggregated by region and gender) and the proportion of children who access pre-primary school/kindergarten. Data on health are available for stunting and malnutrition, infant and maternal mortality rates, the fertility rate and household expenditure on health services. Regarding data on labour and employment, Sierra Leone is working on collecting data that can be used to derive key indicators on the labour market. Hence, Sierra Leone has quality data on education, health and labour. Nevertheless, improvements are needed in the

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[1] Conducted in 2008 and 2013, this survey provides data on the health status of women and children, especially anthropometry (stunting, wasting and nutritional status), HIV/AIDS (human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome) prevalence and exposure to violence.
[2] Conducted in 2000, 2005 and 2010, the survey provides data on the school completion rate, the pass rate in national examinations and birth registration.
[3] Conducted in 2003 and 2010, with one pending for 2016, this survey provides information on employment and the labour force, income and expenditure, and migration.
[4] Conducted in 2004 with the next survey pending in December, 2015, the survey provides information on household composition, the dependency ratio, the labour force participation rate and other key indicators on the labour market.

frequency of data collection and the calculation of more indicators. To successfully monitor progress on the SDGs, deliberate efforts are needed to improve Geographical Information System data collection on the environment and disaster management and coordinate data collection on energy and infrastructure, governance and global partnership. Indeed, of the eight potential indicators examined for energy and infrastructure, data exists for one. Data exists for only one of the nine indicators examined for the goal area related to governance. Similarly, though Sierra Leone has established Development Assistance Database, data related to global partnership will need to be improved, particularly for indicators which track progress on financial and trade flows beyond official development assistance.

Notwithstanding efforts on the NSDS, there is ample room for improvement in data collection in Sierra Leone. Mechanisms and policies need to be put into place to increase the frequency of data collection and quality of data collected as well as to determine modes of data collection, the best time periods and what type of data should be collected by specific entities, including CSOs and non-governmental organisations.

Political Economy Dimensions

Due to the numerous challenges facing SSL, Sierra Leone is not in a good position to comprehensively measure progress on the SDGs. In particular, the institution is not autonomous and is reliant on the government of Sierra Leone or donors to fund its activities. The capacity of SSL to produce high-quality data has been questioned and under scrutiny as a result of its heavy reliance on technical assistance from the World Bank, UN or International Monetary Fund.

> Sierra Leone is not in a good position to comprehensively measure progress on the SDGs. SSL is not autonomous and the organisation relies heavily on technical assistance from the World Bank, UN or International Monetary Fund to carry out its work.

> The government of Sierra Leone should legislate for all data collection to be coordinated and superintended by SSL and for the attachment of statisticians to all ministries, departments and agencies who act as liaison officers between their respective entities and SSL. This approach could lead to standardised data collection methodologies, quality assurance and better data comparability over time.

Unofficial data are collected by various commissions, such as the Anti-Corruption Commission and Decentralisation Secretariat, and core government entities. For example, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation collects programmatic heath data, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology collects data on education, the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs collects tourism data, the police and courts collect data on criminals and crimes, and many other government entities collect administrative data that are not for public or academic use. Overall, these unofficial data cannot be used for measuring progress on the SDGs because objectives and methodologies might not be compatible and thus cannot provide a basis for comparison. The government of Sierra Leone should legislate for all data collection to be coordinated and superintended by SSL and for the attachment of statisticians to all ministries, departments and agencies who act as liaison officers between their respective entities and SSL. This approach could lead to standardised data collection methodologies, quality assurance and better data comparability over time.

Even with the small amount of official data available, access to these data by researchers is a problem, with either the frequency of data collection being low or time series datammissing. The Parliament of Sierra Leone recently passed the Freedom of Information Act, but as with most enactments in the country, implementation to the letter has been problematic. Thus, holding government accountable for progress on the MDGs so far, as well as the proposed SDG areas, has been difficult. It should be noted that the capabilities and role of civil society have been reduced in recent years, which has led funds dedicated for CSOs to flow through the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development as well as non-state actors. As such, the government of Sierra Leone has the power to influence CSOs, especially when there are concerns about the lack of transparency in operational and accounting procedures. Still, CSOs recognise the country's capacity to achieve the MDGs and, in turn, they have been requesting that the government increase spending on education and health, reduce its debt burden and focus on promoting environmentally sustainable practices.

Though Sierra Leone has recently passed a Freedom of Information Act, access to data and other government information has remained a challenge owing to problematic implementation. Reduced capacity within civil society has also limited the ability of CSOs to hold the government to account for progress on the MDGs. Without greater resourcing and autonomy, this will also likely be the case for the SDGs.

Recommendations

Efforts to strengthen Sierra Leone's statistical system should include the provision of financial and human resources, improvements in data infrastructure, and the implementation of staff retention and capacity development programmes.

Sierra Leone's national statistical system needs to be strengthened. Strengthening should not be limited to the provision of financial and human resources. It should also include improving infrastructure and implementing a staff retention mechanism and staff exchange programme that will allow staff members to visit other statistical and international institutions. In turn, such initiatives will enhance the provision of timely, relevant and good-quality data for evidence-based policy-making. Additionally, Sierra Leone should design a model for sound statistical information collection and create a National Data Repository–hosting institution.

SSL should prepare an outreach programme for other data producers and data users. It should disseminate information about policies and procedures related to the preparation and presentation of metadata as well as methods of reporting on the quality of data sources. More needs to be done to improve the compilation of data on new entrants into the labour market through the establishment of a labour market information system, which considers the environment, gender, governance, rule of law, energy and infrastructure. Slight improvements or additions to some indicators on health, education and global partnership would provide national and global indicators that are adequate for monitoring the SDGs.

There is no question that inclusivity is an important part of the post-2015 agenda. As Sierra Leone embarks on implementation of the SDGs, consultations with domestic stakeholders will be a necessity when national priorities are to be identified. The government of Sierra Leone has to ensure that all stakeholders, including local government functionaries, are sufficiently consulted on the SDGs and that an effective enabling environment exists for CSOs to provide input and feedback on the government's monitoring of the MDGs and preparedness for monitoring of the SDGs. Without an appropriate outreach mechanism to include all stakeholders in data collection, use and dissemination, SSL cannot effectively provide the required data for monitoring progress on the SDGs.

As Sierra Leone embarks on the implementation of the SDGs, consultations with domestic stakeholders will be necessary when national priorities are identified to support implementation, data collection and accountability processes.