



Overcoming State Underperformance: How Incentives Can Accelerate Growth and Stability in Sierra Leone

1. Introduction

This paper explores the possibility of improving political stability and increasing productivity through incentivising public officials and making state institutions effective. Drawing on examples from multiple countries that have successfully utilised ‘incentives for public sector results’ as well as ‘disincentives for delivery failures’, we illustrate how Sierra Leone could improve performance through behavioural change among elites for improved public investment outcomes.

After 22 years of post-conflict peace rebuilding and economic development, it’s time to look back and ask, why are many growth indicators for Sierra Leone still below and behind the country’s pre-war accomplishments? Once a rice-exporting country to neighboring Guinea and Liberia in the 1970s, Sierra Leone has become excessively dependent on imported staples. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a

reoccurrence of several misconducts highlighted in the Government Transition Team (GTT) report,² which were addressed through the prosecutions at the start of the Bio Administration. These reoccurrences indicate that challenges of state underperformance may be systemic rather than attributable to any single political group. As regimes change, new administrations often replace personnel without instituting the needed structural reforms of the underlying delivery systems responsible for inefficiency and stagnation.

We conclude that making the state effective requires a more systemic approach to institutional reform. This includes designing and piloting a performance-based incentive framework to strengthen critical institutions such as the civil service, the judiciary, and parliament, as well as instituting measures to discipline and recall MPs, judges, and magistrates.

2. The state of the state: Rule of law and parliamentary performance

Post-conflict Sierra Leone has achieved notable successes in reforming institutions responsible for upholding the rule of law and democratic governance. The country has successfully held five post-conflict elections, resulting in two peaceful transfers of power to opposition parties. Additionally, progress has been made in various areas, including police-community relations,

¹ Critical Perspectives of Governance is IGR’s quarterly publication that investigates governance issues to generate debates among researchers and practitioners. IGR notes that sometimes conventional theory and practice can be ill-suited to the challenges of governance. It is always necessary to be open to new ideas and generate debates. Please contact info@igr-sl.org regarding further use of this work.

² [Republic of Sierra Leone - Report of Government Transition Team 2018.](#)

improved recruitment, training, and deployment of police officers,³ and the decentralisation of the justice system by appointing judges and magistrates to remote communities. There has also been an increase in the percentage of women in institutions. Despite these commendable efforts, there has been a gradual return to pre-war political cultures and social contexts, which has led to increased polarisation and a further weakening of institutions.

2.1. An Extractive Machinery Remains Intact Even as Regime Changes

From academic literature on regime performance, reformers frequently ask two basic questions: why do institutional behaviours remain unchanged even when there is a change of government?⁴ Why do the civil service, parliament and the judiciary perform better in some countries but fail in many poor countries despite significant reform efforts?⁵ One response by Robinson and Acemoglu⁶ speaks directly to these questions by arguing that institutions continue to fail because they are not designed to serve the public interest but rather, a few elites. In line with this logic, these behaviours persist because successive regimes ensure that the extractive machinery including the civil service remains intact, focusing only on changing personnel and not the delivery mechanism, i.e., the state, its systems, and culture. The executive too often ensures that watch-dog institutions such as parliament and judiciary lack tools and equipment to function properly and finances to sustain themselves. Court fines and fees all go to the single treasury account controlled by the Ministry of Finance that determines budget allocations. In an environment with limited resources and a small private sector, the state machinery remains the primary source for wealth, and its capture, the ultimate goal. For this reason, governing parties centralise public sector appointments, promotions, and dismissals at State House with jobs passed out to supporters based on electoral support rather than capacity and performance. A common phrase, ‘this is our turn’⁷, has become a mantra of governance, as public sector appointments favour groups and regions of governing parties.⁸

2.2. Citizen’s Actions and Expectations Weaken Institutions

Too often, courts make poor decisions, and politicians become corrupt due to societal pressure. Citizens have come to accept a political culture that prioritises their narrow interests over the public interest that institutions ought to serve. Just as it is common for the average Sierra Leonean to bribe a judge or magistrate to swing cases in their favour or to speak to a politician with the aim of influencing a court case, so has it become commonplace for individuals to expect direct material benefits from elected and appointed officials. Many societal connections are utilised by citizens to compel public officials to bend and break the rules. This political culture shapes the relationships between politicians and citizens, influences citizens’ civic posture, and defines the informal rules, mechanisms, and practices of governance. In other words, in the political culture of Sierra Leone, citizens accept that the State presents considerable opportunities for looting; and politics is merely an exercise in securing a vantage position to partake in the spoils. A 2020 Afrobarometer survey found that the majority (60%) of Sierra Leoneans believe that MPs should provide direct financial support to their

³ Bah, A. and N. Emmanuel, eds. (2024). *International State building in West Africa: Civil Wars and New Humanitarianism in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d’Ivoire*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

⁴ Hyden, G. (2008). Institutions, Power and Policy Outcomes in Africa; (Discussion paper No2)

⁵ Ziblatt, D. and Steven Levitsky (2019). How Democracies Die? [what is full citation?]

⁶ Acemoglu D. and Robinson J. (2012). Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty

⁷ Peter Beckley – May 2019 – Published [In Cocorioko](#) online newspaper

⁸ Lindberg, S. I. (2003). “It’s Our Time to ‘Chop’”: Do Elections in Africa Feed Neo-Patrimonialism rather than Counter-Act It? *Democratization*, 10(2), 121–140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/714000118>

constituents. The phrase ‘this is our turn’ arises from experiences that facilitate, instrumentalise, and reward ethnicity, dishonesty, and disregard for formal rules, which are the foundations of unproductivity and fragility. Institutions serve merely as legitimising fronts in the hands of the elites who disdain what Michael Mann describes as “infrastructural power.” If your ethnic identity carries weight in the prevailing regime, you need not have good grades to secure a government scholarship. If the Party Chairman can secure you a deal, why, as a businessperson, should you be concerned with contract tender rules? Institutions cannot function effectively when patrimonialism becomes the language for conducting business.

2.3.APC and SLPP Face Similar Challenges in State Management

While citizens have had an opportunity to hold politicians to account by voting out MPs in large numbers in periodic elections, law enforcement personnel are rarely penalised for the routine incidences of openly receiving bribes and failing to execute court decisions. Similarly, citizens notice that judges are rarely reprimanded for delays in cases or failure to make right judgements, and numerous media reports highlight courts being used to target political opponents. It appears that the institutional culture and practices which political parties vehemently criticise while in opposition rarely change when they assume power. In the table below, we illustrate five examples of issues in the 2018 GTT report that were condemned by the SLPP during their time in opposition but have since resurfaced under their administration:

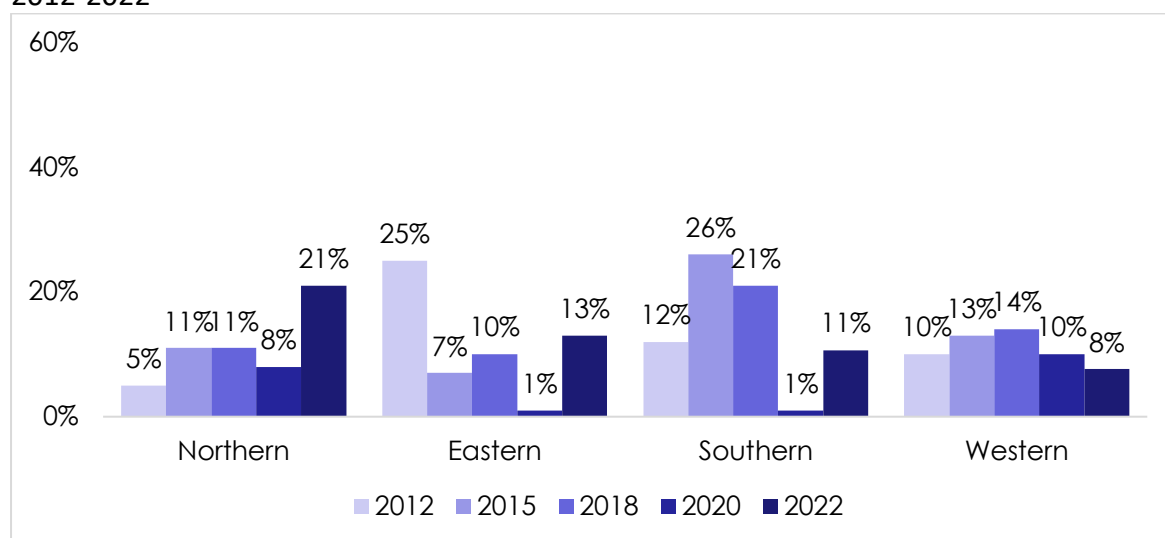
Misconducts	Under APC	Under SLPP
Occupancy of private buildings by public offices	The GTT report noted that a large number of public agencies rented private residences as offices, often at inflated prices; often belonging to APC officials	Occupancy of private premises by state/public agencies continues, often at inflated costs. Anecdotally, some properties are found to belong to SLPP officials.
Mismanagement of government assets	Mismanagement of public assets resulting in their decay and disuse, as well as illicit transfers to public officials or politically connected individuals. The O.A.U villas were used as examples.	There has been no recorded progress in the management of public assets; and there is evidence of continued transfers of government assets to public officials, usually without any public tenders.
Multiplication and duplication of state institutions	Multiplicity, duplication and overlap of government agencies and Commissions that led to the bloating of the wage bill.	The SLPP has similarly engaged in the multiplication and duplication of government agencies and commissions leading to a bloated wage bill.
Management of Capital investment Contracts	Mismanagement of several investment contracts including the Wellington Masiaka Toll Road, Income Electric, sale of Sierra Leone’s share of Sierra Rutile, transport, and ports management system, as well as passport deals etc.	Capital investments including the Lungi International Airport, and the planned construction of the new Institute of Public Administration campus have borne losses in circumstances similar to what obtained under the APC.
Ethnicity and cohesion	While in opposition the SLPP routinely echoed the point that the APC had a strategy to populate the public service mainly on ethnic considerations. Amnesty International went on to corroborate the SLPP’s claim. In the GTT Report the SLPP affirmed that the APC carried out a systematic ethnic compensation agenda.	Opposition APC has constantly accused the SLPP of using ethnicity as a key consideration in appointments and strategy to populate the public service. IGR and Afrobarometer data confirm that citizens mainly in opposition areas feel unfairly treated and neglected by government, a similar occurrence under the APC.

While arguments can be made about the differences in the levels of tolerance for exploitation between the two parties, the reality is that there seems to be a consensus on zero commitment to building an enduring mechanism to end impunity and abuse.

2.4.Divisions between ‘entitled and aggrieved’ citizens breeds fragility and weakness

Afrobarometer data⁹ (see figure below) illustrates a political culture that mirrors itself on both sides of the ethno-regional divide where, over the past 15 years, citizens either feel entitled to state power and resources or aggrieved or excluded, depending upon which party is in power. For example, in 2012 and 2015, when the APC was in power, respondents in the South and East (SLPP strongholds) were more likely to say that they experienced unfair treatment. This flipped in 2020 and 2022 when the SLPP was in power. This suggests that governing party supporters feel entitled to state resources and protection if in power, while opposition groups feel marginalised and unfairly treated. This division comes with many challenges. First, it has made it difficult for citizens in different regions to cooperate and jointly demand improved governance. It has also fostered a semi-permanent state of dysfunction and unproductivity as ruling party-aligned bureaucrats stay in their jobs despite poor performance. Thirdly, divisions have contributed to a chain of violent protests and political instability¹⁰, including a recent attempted coup that arose from disagreements among Sierra Leone elites.

Frequent unfair treatment of ethnic groups by government | by province | Sierra Leone | 2012-2022



Respondents were asked: How often, if ever, are [members of the respondent's ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government? (% who say "often" or "always")

(Note: In this figure, the Northern Province includes the North-West Province, which was created in 2017 and was not reported separately in earlier Afrobarometer surveys.)

A recent study¹¹ on the cost of political instability in seven West African states¹² demonstrates that the country dropped 21 spaces on the Global Peace Index between 2022 and 2024 and impeded GDP growth by 7% (equivalent to \$417M USD) in 2023 as a result of political

⁹ Afrobarometer News release 2023 - As elections approach in Sierra Leone, citizens' attitudes raise warning flags

¹⁰ Amnesty International (2023). "[Sierra Leone: Still no justice for victims of August 2022 violent protests more than one year on](#)," (October 17).

¹¹ IGR (2014). The Cost of Violent Protests and Political Instability; Critical Perspectives of Governance Vol XVIII

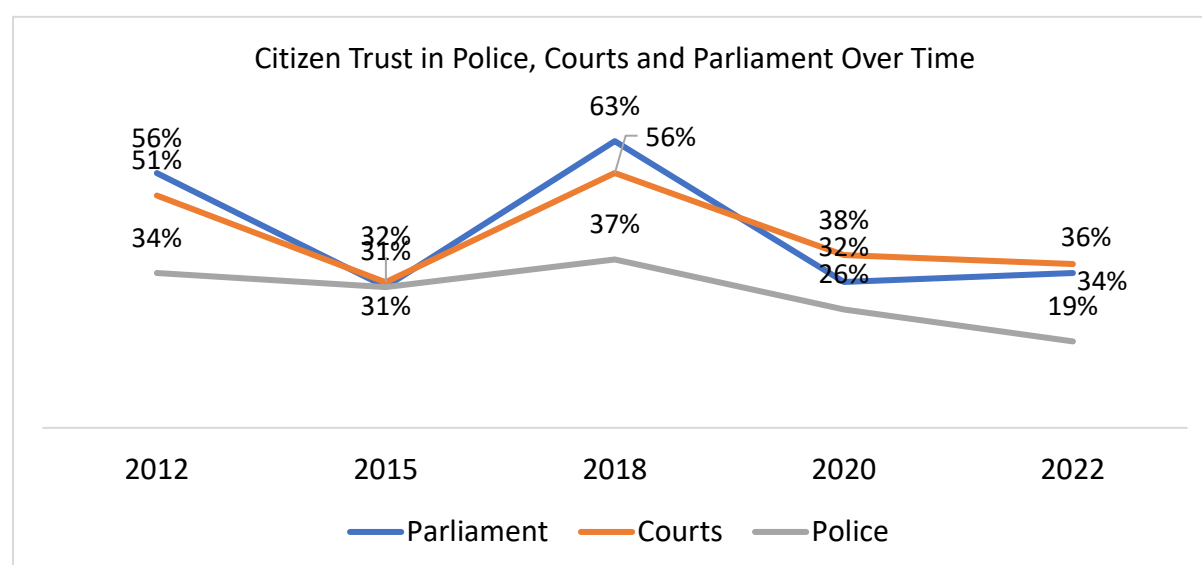
¹² Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Burkina Faso, and Mali

violence. Trust in institutions is also low. The same study also concluded that Sierra Leone's low score on citizen trust in their courts and the police is making the country more prone to violent protest and greater disproportionate loss in GDP than the other countries.

2.5. Underperformance leads to decline in public trust in institutions

A trend analysis (see figure below) using AB data demonstrates declining levels of public trust over the last 15 years – in the police (19%), parliament (34%) and the courts (36%) with the lowest rates recorded in 2022. As stated earlier, one common explanation for this trust deficit is that these institutions appear to be co-opted by the executive under successive regimes, thus making it difficult to disincentivise misconduct or abuse. They also lack financial and operational autonomy.

Executive co-optation of these institutions has resulted in years of complaints and frustration with regime-controlled policing and courts. Sierra Leone has experienced years of usurpation of citizens' right¹³ to protest¹⁴, as well as low access to justice, especially for the poor and less connected.¹⁵ MPs are perceived to be working for themselves – with little scrutiny or oversight of executive appointments, contracts, and agreements. Nearly 8 in 10 Sierra Leoneans think that MPs are “not very effective” or “not at all effective” at delivering jobs or development to their constituency (79%), listening to their constituents, and representing their needs in Parliament (75%).¹⁶ Weaknesses around these institutions that are meant to uphold the rule of law mean that the state loses considerably in large economic transactions, contributing to lower revenue levels to run the state. Protesting these issues has sometimes met with violent police overreaction and state repression.



¹³ The Sierra Leone Telegraph – 2015 – Protesters beaten up and Human Rights Activists Arrested in Sierra Leone

¹⁴ Civicus (2022). [Sierra Leone: stop violence against peaceful protesters and respect democratic rights of citizens](#). 12 July.

¹⁵ Dale, P. (2007). Barriers to Justice in Sierra Leone. Justice for the Poor Briefing Note;1(4). © World Bank, Washington, DC. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/30539> License: [CC BY 3.0 IGO](#)."

¹⁶ Afrobarometer (2020). [MPs are failing at the jobs that Sierra Leoneans want them to do, Afrobarometer survey shows](#). 15 September.

3. Past and Present Approaches are Inadequate

There have been efforts by successive governments, opposition parties, and development partners to improve the capacity of institutions to deliver results. However, Sierra Leone's low performance on many governance and development indicators suggests that these efforts have failed to improve on the delivery of institutions. Rather, in many cases, data shows a steady weakening of critical institutions, such as the judiciary and parliament. We present below three sets of policy and programmatic responses by governing parties, opposition parties and development partners to address institutional failures. What is common is that programmes rarely target political and institutional behavioural change.

3.1. Governing party strategy and incentive

The political strategy of successive governing parties has largely been the same. With their routine focus on the next election, governing parties are too often cagey about the political benefits of introducing broad institutional reforms. The political strategy has always been to try to deliver on campaign promises without reforming the processes and procedures that generate underperformance. We see broad personnel changes with new public staff working in a state architecture that is not designed to deliver economic and political stability. Even the most accomplished experts hired by government end up joining a system that does not inspire success and performance. For instance, an accomplished professor of peace studies employed at the helm of leadership in the SLPP left more challenges to peace and stability in Sierra Leone than at the time he assumed office. Equally, an accomplished professor of agriculture hired by the APC as Minister of Agriculture failed to show results in agricultural productivity.

In basic change management, a change in personnel unaccompanied by improvement in a delivery system results in no real change. For instance, Sierra Leone has been under emergency power for over 15 years and has failed to focus on a sustainable and cost-effective method of delivering electricity. This has led to a substantial debt burden and frequent power outages nationwide. Similarly, years of implementing Free Education and Free Healthcare programmes have left the country reliant on aid to finance these services, as there is a lack of sustainable solutions for human capital development. Investments in roads, bridges, and agriculture are framed as interventions that secure votes, rather than being seen through the lens of effective state-building. The failure to reform the delivery mechanisms has entrenched a culture of underperformance within institutions, causing project after project to fail in addressing institutional effectiveness. Unsurprisingly, the compensation of loyalists has resulted in a significant rise in personnel numbers, along with an unnecessary duplication of institutions.

3.2. Opposition political parties' strategies and incentives

If managed effectively, opposition parties can serve as a dependable resource for introducing a new culture or ethos into a democratic society. However, years of dysfunctional opposition have made it challenging for these parties to act as agents of reform since the return to multiparty rule in 1996. IGR's paper¹⁷ on the costs of dysfunctional opposition indicates that that, while in opposition (2002 to 2007), an APC faction took Ernest Koroma to court for an alleged breach of his party's constitution, with the issue only being resolved a few months to

¹⁷ IGR 2015 - Critical Perspectives of Governance, Vol IV, July - The Cost of Sierra Leone's Dysfunctional Opposition

his victory in 2007. Between 2005 and 2018, the SLPP experienced numerous conflicts over leadership, resulting in a decline in party cohesion from one leadership contest to another. Since 2018, the APC has faced many internal disputes, making it difficult to be effective.

In explaining the drivers of dysfunctionality within opposition parties, we note that both the opposition and governing parties share the same basic approach. There is no discernible ideology guiding either party, nor any niche philosophical interests such as workers' rights, environmental protection, or business creation. Their sole motivations appear to revolve around changing personnel and replacing the government without necessarily altering the system. In the absence of a genuine reform agenda, most internal conflicts have centred on who should lead the takeover, thereby maintaining the extractive mechanism. Opposition parties engage in no self-corrective actions and fail to provide alternative proposals for reform within both their party and the state. True to form, the main opposition party has effectively adopted a stance of permanent politics, seeking to keep its supporters aggrieved, with no efforts aimed at governance or improved developmental outcomes. Inevitably, the status quo remains unchanged regardless of which party governs the country. A prominent Sierra Leonean democracy analyst interviewed for this paper expressed concerns that Sierra Leone should be wary of revenge politics ahead of the 2028 elections.

Apart from the main opposition, there is another set of 15 registered parties that many see as opportunistic – seeking opportunities for co-optation by major parties with attendant benefits.

3.3. Development partner approaches

In our review of donor programmes (including those provided by Western agencies and China¹⁸) and their policy stances over the last twenty years, we note that too often, many development partners mistakenly believe that Sierra Leone's political parties have different cultures and that progress can be possible with a simple change of government. Both SLPP and APC often accuse development partners of regime change and regime protection. This makes it worthwhile to understand donor support for state building.

From our review of over 10 state-building programmes, donor approaches can be grouped into three broad categories. The first and most common instrument is to provide funding and technical support in the form of equipment, materials, infrastructure, and training. In some cases, technical advisors, and Project Implementation Units (PIUs) are embedded within the very institutions to bypass the weak state bureaucracy for procurement, financial management and project implementation. Funding, technical support and PIUs have no proven record of generating an enduring political commitment to reform. Even though, across the board, most of the progress achieved (health, education) in rebuilding Sierra Leone after the civil war are in areas with heavy donor investment, it has been difficult to sustain such gains and transfer the systems and practices to the state bureaucracy and political institutions.

The second instrument is using funding as a leverage to achieve certain outcomes. This instrument can be subdivided into two: direct budgetary support to GoSL's Ministry of Finance to meet agreed policy outcomes and using project activity-based financing, such as the release of funds in tranches upon meeting agreed milestones for fund disbursement. However, there have been challenges with both types of funding instruments. When disbursement or the absorptive capacity of specific donor projects becomes the primary measure of the performance

¹⁸ Conditions for China's support are largely unknown

of donor representatives, this may give rise to turning a blind eye to needed reform, and fund disbursement becomes a box-ticking exercise. Quite a few instances exist when institutions revert to behaviours they promised to correct after meeting donor funding conditions. For instance, after Sierra Leone's suspension from the EITI in 2013, Koroma passed the Access to Information law as a requirement for budgetary support. However, disclosure of critical information remains a challenge. Furthermore, after meeting all the requirements for the MCC in 2022, the US nearly cancelled the grant in 2023 due to criticisms surrounding the openness of the election's vote tabulation process.

The third approach involves donors' support for CSOs and NGOs to promote reforms. While this can be a powerful way to build a forward momentum for change, the fact that some investments are not tied to verifiable indicators of institutional behaviour change can limit the potential for transformation. There have been instances where donor support has been used by CSOs to score political points instead of promoting genuine reforms.

4. How Sierra Leone Can Use Incentives for Results

In this section, we propose some reform ideas to improve judicial and parliamentary effectiveness. We note that context and political economy matter in applying incentives to successfully motivate change. For this reason, countries have employed various financial and non-material incentives that they deem appropriate for motivating performance. One example of applying the combination of frontal approaches to restore public confidence in institutions is in the country of Georgia. Between 2003 and 2010, the Georgian government launched a campaign of prosecution, targeting high-ranking officials. In this campaign, 1,000 public officials were charged with corruption offences. Moreover, a complete overhaul of the highly corrupt police forces was undertaken, resulting in the firing of about 15,000 police personnel and the dissolution of the traffic police. With these efforts, 60 percent of the Georgian 2004 Global Corruption Barometer respondents said they expect corruption to decrease over the next three years – the biggest leap of any country in terms of perceptions of corruption¹⁹.

Given the entrenched political influence on the public service, as well as the polarization and fragile nature of Sierra Leone, mass sacking and prosecutions will be politically risky. Rather, carefully planned performance-based incentives can help to motivate better behaviours from workers in the public sector just as in the private sector. There are many examples to learn from to understand the risks as well as opportunities inherent in the introduction of incentive-based systems. A study in Indonesia found that offering incentive payments to villages based on their performance on a set of health indicators improved outcomes such as prenatal visits and malnutrition rates²⁰. In the education sector, Muralidharan and Sundararaman²¹ (2011) examined a large-scale programme in India, where public school teachers' pay was partly determined by student test scores. After two years, they found that the relatively small incentives – equal to 3% of teachers' annual salaries on average – substantially improved student learning in math and language. In the area of public finance, an IGC study²² by Khan, Khwaja and Olken (2014) in Pakistan found that in areas where tax collectors were offered

¹⁹ Chêne M. 2011 - Anti-corruption progress in Georgia, Liberia, Rwanda – Transparency International

²⁰ Olken, Onishi and Wong (2014). Should Aid Reward Performance? Evidence from a Field Experiment on Health and Education in Indonesia, published by American Economic Journal

²¹ Muralidharan and Sundararaman (2011). Teacher Performance Pay – Experimental Evidence from India

²² Adnan Q. Khan & Asim I. Khwaja & Benjamin A. Olken (2014). "Tax Farming Redux: Experimental Evidence on Performance Pay for Tax Collectors," NBER Working Papers 20627, National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc.

large financial incentives, revenue growth was 13 percentage points greater than in areas without incentives.

However, studies also caution that performance incentives can backfire – particularly where desired outcomes are broad or difficult to measure. For instance, research on the Nigerian civil service shows that incentives that reward ‘box ticking’ can reduce bureaucrats’ performance (Rasul and Rogger, 2018)²³. Similarly, a study on financial incentives for nurses’ attendance in India found that incentives were ineffective because the attendance reporting system was undermined over time (Banerjee, Glennerster and Duflo, 2008)²⁴. It is, therefore, advisable that incentives are linked to behaviours or outcomes within the scope of what workers can effect, and incentive schemes should be simple enough to be widely understood.

Non-financial incentives such as promotions, social recognition and transfers can provide cost-effective strategies for motivating government workers. We consider two areas where we can apply the logic of incentives to improve institutional performance: the judiciary and parliament.

4.1. Incentives for judicial performance

There is no known mechanism in Sierra Leone for monitoring the performance of the courts to determine promotions, transfers, or the assignment of cases. This situation leaves judicial leaders, including judges, with considerable discretion in determining case outcomes. Such discretion has exposed them to accusations of lacking independence from the executive and failing to properly protect citizens’ rights. Similar to Parliament, the judiciary does not possess a self-financing mechanism. Court budgets are established by the Ministry of Finance. Below, we propose an incentive system aimed at improving the overall performance of the courts, that addresses both the delay in cases as well as ensures fairness in decision-making and insulation from political and other pressures.

Institutions monitoring judicial performance use a three-part ‘system-model’ to assess effectiveness: input, throughput, and output²⁵. Inputs can refer to resources such as personnel (judges and court staff), material (court buildings, office equipment, etc.), and financial resources (the budget of a court). All these resources can directly impact a court's productivity, i.e., a lack of judges, staff, equipment, and adequate budget can lead to an increase in the length of proceedings and a growing backlog of cases. The throughput of a court is the process wherein the incoming cases are treated by judges and court staff, resulting in a judicial decision (the output). Output must be focused on the quality of the judgement. Overall, in assessing judges and courts, balance between ‘productivity/efficiency’ and ‘quality’ is recommended.

We draw attention to four efficiency performance indicators to be considered in design an incentive scheme for the judiciary:

1. The caseload per judge: this is the number of cases assigned to a judge or magistrate. Financial and non-financial incentives can be tied to the completion of assigned cases.

²³ Management of Bureaucrats and Public Service Delivery: Evidence from the Nigerian Civil Service. *he Economic Journal*, Volume 128, Issue 608, 1 February 2018, pp: 413–446

²⁴ Abhijit V. Banerjee, Rachel Glennerster and Esther Duflo (2008). Putting a Band-Aid on a Corpse: Incentives for Nurses in the Indian Public Health Care System - *Journal of the European Economic Association*

²⁵ Pim Albers – 2009 - Performance indicators and evaluation for judges and courts (Special Adviser to the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice)

2. Productivity (labour) and duration of proceedings: This refers to the efficiency of the courts, including the steps taken by a court to minimize a backlog of cases and reducing adjournments. The judiciary could develop a scheme that could tie successful prosecution and judgment with financial rewards and social recognition.
3. Cost per case or judicial action: Currently there are no rewards for judicial staffers that provide mechanisms that contribute to savings for the state or clients. The judiciary should develop a scheme that provides financial and non-financial rewards to judges, magistrates, and administrative staff whose actions result in GoSL making savings in areas such as reducing the cost of feeding prisoners, reducing the cost of case management, or improving law and order in a geographic location.
4. Disincentives for judges: The judiciary to establish a mechanism for performance reviews, including the issuance of formal warnings for misconduct, unjustified case delays, and undermining public trust in the court.
5. Sub-treasury for the judiciary: Establishing a sub-treasury for the judiciary, financed through court fines. Central government allocation should, it is hoped, reduce executive control over the judiciary and enhance its independence and performance.

In addition to these measures, the judiciary could consider establishing clear, publicly known, verifiable criteria for promotions and demotions to help limit discretion and avoid this low threshold of promotions based on longevity of service. The judiciary could also reward innovations in the swift delivery of justice and responsiveness to citizens' feedback gathered through annual surveys on the fairness of the courts. The judiciary could also consider utilising non-material incentives, such as presidential awards and other forms of recognition of high-performing judges and judicial officials.

4.2. Incentives for Parliamentary Performance

In crafting an incentive system for Parliament, parliamentary strengthening institutions such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) suggest being mindful of the political and economic conditions under which MPs perform their roles. As noted in many surveys, only a few Sierra Leoneans believe their MPs are fulfilling responsibilities such as holding the executive to account (16%), delivering jobs and development in constituencies (12%), and listening to their constituents (16%). In fact, a 2020 Afrobarometer²⁶ survey found that a majority (60%) of Sierra Leoneans believe that MPs should provide direct financial support to their constituents but only 13% say they do so in practice. This gap between the perceived role of an MP as a provider of material benefits and their constitutional role contribute to the deep trust deficit, and over 9 in 10 (91%) respondents believe that some or all MPs are corrupt (Afrobarometer 2022). Consequently, until the reintroduction of the proportional representation system that allow parties to put most incumbent MPs on the list, less than one-third of parliamentary incumbents were re-elected in every election.

In interviews with parliamentary leaders, there are strong concerns that the misleading views citizens hold about their role creates expectations that have become difficult to manage, impacting their effectiveness, particularly regarding ethical oversight and scrutiny roles. "Frankly, it is the executive that controls Parliament. Sometimes, MDAs have to pay for parliamentary oversight visits because we MPs are generally under-resourced. A bank debtor

²⁶ Afrobarometer News Release 2020 - MPs are failing at the jobs that Sierra Leoneans want them to do, Afrobarometer survey shows

list published in 2014 reveals that many of us MPs are incurring debt to win elections and maintain power. (Interview with a former MP – February 2025).

A related effect of this discrepancy in citizen-parliamentarian relations is that MP Constituency relations are strained. One way to address this would be to consider introducing the Kenya Model that assigns constituency development funds to MPs. Careful thought must be assigned to this, however, given that Sierra Leone currently is operating under the PR system rather than a constituency based one.

With this understanding of the MPs' reality, we can now turn to ideas for incentivising performance. We utilise performance indicators developed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union²⁷ (IPU) and its partners to identify areas for incentivisation. The IPU's parliamentary indicators comprise seven sub-targets and 25 indicators. We concentrate on two indicators – parliamentary ethics and parliamentary oversight. We focus on these two because measures such as the number of laws and treaties passed by Parliament and MP attendance, which are commonly used, have not substantially improved commitment to ethics and effectiveness, the two areas where MPs often perform poorly in citizen perception surveys (see Afrobarometer 2020).

While ethics are defined as the standards of conduct expected of parliament and MPs, both within and outside the parliamentary chamber, effective oversight, conversely, involves the exercise of parliamentary powers to appoint and dismiss the executive, summon executives in committees and plenary sessions, question executive activities, conduct hearings, and carry out committee enquiries. This is a significant responsibility that is often overlooked due to the weak ethical stance perpetuated by our political culture. Tackling this issue will necessitate incentives that encourage MPs to recognise the financial benefits of doing the right thing – prioritising citizens' interests. Accordingly, we recommend the following:

1. Establishing a sub-treasury for parliament: like the judiciary, establishing a sub-treasury for parliament is a step towards increasing independence and improving performance of the legislature. As in other parliaments in the region, the sub-treasury, can be financed through the activities for parliament such as a modest percentage (say 0.2%) of revenue for all mines and minerals agreements passed; and taking a percentage (say 5%) of the savings the State makes from every existing contract reviewed by Parliament. This would enable parliamentary activities to be self-funded with minimal reliance on the executive. Sub-treasury accounts can still be subject to external audit, but the budget ceiling of parliament should not be determined by the executive.
2. Tie performance of parliamentary institutions to reward: Once a special treasury is created, Parliament can design an incentive system where committees that help the state block leakages through their oversight work and ensure compliance with audit recommendations are rewarded based on an agreed principle.
3. Allocate constituency development fund for each MP: These funds should be managed by a Commission rather than the MP. MPs should work with communities to design projects and then apply to the commission for funding.

²⁷ <https://www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2022-06/ipu-launches-new-indicators-measure-parliamentary-performance>

4. Disincentives for MPs non-performance: Transparency and the Ethics committees to develop legislation and protocols for disciplining and recalling non-performing MPs for misconduct, including actions that undermine the public's trust in parliament.

5. Recommendations to various actors

Amidst the low trust of institutions and years of development failures, this paper suggests concrete ideas that offer an opportunity to reset and enable institutions to better respond to the challenges Sierra Leone faces. The recommendations below are consistent with Stefan Dercon's view that the answer to addressing development failures lie not in a specific set of policies, but rather, in a key "development bargain," whereby a country's elites (politicians, businesses, and non-state actors) shift from protecting their own positions to agreeing on a growth-based future²⁸. The fact that political parties across the divide agreed on 80 recommendations in the US-funded Tripartite Committee sessions shows that appetite for reform and consensus building exists, that parties are united in their understanding of the challenges that Sierra Leone faces, and largely agree on the way forward.

We propose the following recommendations for building political consensus on reform, as evidenced by the tripartite recommendations, while at the same time guiding the operationalization of how stakeholders can work together to chart a collective beneficial future.

Theme	Recommendation	Responsible
Judicial and parliamentary independence from the executive	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GoSL to restore sub-treasuries for parliament and the judiciary to enable both institutions to be self-sustaining. 2. Financial and non-financial incentives for performance to be designed and delivered by parliament and judiciary. 3. Parliament to hold a cross-party debate on incentive system for MPs as part of a wider public education effort on incentives for public sector performance. 	Ministry of Finance Parliament and the Judiciary Parliament
Design and pilot performance-based systems for parliament and the judiciary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. GoSL to pilot a performance-based rewards and disincentive system for parliament and the judiciary that include both financial and non-financial incentives as well as measures to punish underperformance such as recalling MPs and de-barring judicial actors. 5. Establish a constituency development fund for MPs that is managed by an independent agency. 	Ministry of Public Administration & PSRU
Invest in a performance-based pilot system to monitor change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Development partners to invest in a pilot performance-based system for parliament and judiciary. 7. Development partner's investment in CSOs to be more targeted at measurable institutional behaviour change outcomes. 8. Establishment of a legal framework and HR protocols to separate political and non-political appointees. 9. Conduct further research into the financial sustainability of parliament and the judiciary. 	Development partners CSOs Ministry of Justice IGR

²⁸ Dercon, Stefan. *Gambling on development*. Hurst publishers, 2022.