



**UK SIERRA LEONE PRO
BONO NETWORK:
MANAGING PRO BONO
PARTNERSHIPS DURING
HEALTH CRISES**



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Advocates for International Development (A4ID), founded in 2006, is a global charity that believes the law can and should, be used more effectively to advance fair and sustainable development. A4ID aims to inspire and enable lawyers to join the global fight to eradicate poverty by advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through A4ID, the world's top lawyers provide free legal support to organisations, working to advance human dignity, equality and justice. Its work has so far impacted in over 130 countries.

A4ID's Rule of Law Expertise (ROLE UK) Programme is funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. It supports partnerships to provide pro bono legal and judicial expertise with the aim to strengthen the rule of law in official development assistance (ODA)-eligible countries. The Programme's Knowledge Hub provides the pro bono legal sector with access to targeted and relevant information to inform and improve their technical assistance in development contexts.

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FOREWORD

Advocates for International Development's (A4ID) ROLE UK Programme (the Programme) supports strategic partnerships between UK legal stakeholders and rule of law actors in Official Development Assistance (ODA)-eligible countries, by facilitating demand-led mobilisation of UK pro bono legal expertise. This peer-to-peer approach is central to ensuring that the Programme supports partnerships which are locally led, high-impact, and sustainable.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Programme supported travel for UK experts to deliver capacity-building training alongside in-country partners. Since the outbreak, both the Programme and its stakeholders have had to strategically adapt to the circumstances and deliver most activities remotely. The Programme has supported remote online activities as well as some activities that have enabled in-country participants to safely gather in person, while their international peers join remotely. During this period, the Programme team has also reflected on the opportunities and challenges that have come with the move to online pro bono delivery, launching a peer-to-peer review¹ aimed at sharing best practice with the community. These

reviews analyse the lessons learnt from this time and reflect on how to best combine remote and in-person work when international travel is possible again, with a focus on balancing the ability to reach new audiences remotely and the need to form strong partnerships in person.

During this period, the Programme has also taken the time to analyse the wider implications that the pandemic has had on the rule of law, launching the 'Rule of Law in Times of Health Crises' paper.² As governments began limiting individual freedoms to control the spread of the virus without pronouncing on their necessity or effectiveness, certain principles of the rule of law were put in question. The 'Rule of Law in Times of Health Crises' paper aimed to consider these questions and the relevance of the rule of law in the event of major crises. A year after the beginning of the pandemic, the Programme continues to play a central role in coordinating efforts to strengthen the rule of law as stakeholders face the challenges brought about by COVID-19. This short paper is complimentary to that work and provides guidance to the community of practice with real-world lessons on how to maintain and

strengthen their pro bono work during a health crisis, by drawing on experiences from a pro bono partnership’s handling of the 2014–2016 Ebola epidemic. These reflections hope to aid other organisations as they continue to re-evaluate their approach to pro bono work for the year ahead, in the face of the continued challenges brought on by the pandemic.

Since 2012, UK pro bono specialists have been involved in Sierra Leone through a number of initiatives including a Bar Council Special Interest Group,³ Project Umubano⁴ and Herbert Smith Freehills’ Fair Deal Sierra Leone,⁵ among

others. In 2014, professionals involved in these initiatives came together to form the UK Sierra Leone Pro Bono Network (UKSLPBN or the Network). This paper brings together evidence from the UK legal sector on how the Network responded and adapted its work as Sierra Leone and neighbouring West African countries were struck by the Ebola outbreak. The outcome is a valuable resource for international rule of law actors that will help them to successfully adapt their work during and beyond a health crisis.

YASMIN BATLIWALA
Chief Executive



Momo Turay, the Network’s Country Director hands a series of books donated by Herbert Smith Freehills to the Sierra Leone Commercial Court

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO THE UK SIERRA LEONE PRO BONO NETWORK

The UK Sierra Leone Pro Bono Network (UKSLPBN) is the umbrella network for UK judges, legal professionals and organisations providing pro bono legal assistance in Sierra Leone. The Network started in 2012 as the Bar Council Sierra Leone Special Interest Group. The group was initially set up following a request for assistance from the Sierra Leone Bar Association to the General Council of the Bar of England and Wales. It has since grown into an independent and multi-disciplinary group involving over 200 legal professionals, formally assembling under the UKSLPBN umbrella in March 2014.

The Network coordinates requests for technical assistance from Sierra Leone with available UK lawyers and legal sector institutions interested in providing pro bono services. UKSLPBN acts as a central hub connecting available and willing pro bono providers directly with on-the-ground beneficiaries in Sierra Leone to provide timely support and fill gaps in justice sector needs. When it was first set up, the main objective of

UKSLPBN was to assist the Government of Sierra Leone in its implementation of the Justice Sector Reform Strategy and Investment Plan for the period 2015 to 2018 (JSRSIP III).⁶ The first activity the Network had planned was a training on commercial contract negotiation to government lawyers and Ministries. This activity, as well as the specific focus of the Network, had to be adapted as the country was struck by the Ebola virus outbreak.

RELATIONSHIP WITH ROLE UK

The relationship between ROLE UK and the UKSLPBN started in late 2015, when ROLE UK, then an independent organisation, supported two assignments in Sierra Leone. Firstly, the travel of a Retired Circuit Judge to the Fast-Track Commercial Court⁷ and secondly a scoping visit of the Legal Aid Board with a view to designing a support programme.⁸ The relationship was officialised in November 2016 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in which both organisations set their intention to continue to work together to improve the rule of law in Sierra Leone. The MoU outlined ROLE UK's expectations that the Network would provide

reliable insight into the rule of law needs in Sierra Leone and ROLE UK's commitment to provide further financial support to the Network. The ultimate beneficiaries of ROLE UK's support for the Network's activities continue to be the people of Sierra Leone who have endured a civil war and a major outbreak of Ebola and have been left with weak institutions and rule of law.



This relationship has been solidified over the years, with ROLE UK supporting 15 assignments, mobilising over 26 legal pro bono experts since 2015.

Today, A4ID's ROLE UK Programme continues this partnership with UKSLPBN and provides funding support to a full-time partnership consultant, Momo Turay, who is based in Freetown. This consultant supports UKSLPBN and the ROLE UK Programme to make a

strategic, relevant and sustainable contribution to strengthening the rule of law, working with UK experts on ongoing areas of support to the Anti-Corruption court, judicial reform and other areas. It also enables the network to maintain relationships with actors in Sierra Leone, ensuring the network can direct its assistance in a demand-led way.

With this support, the Network has been able to broaden its work and strategic relationships with key stakeholders in Sierra Leone. As of 2021, the Network has established a strong relationship with Sierra Leone's Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to amend the Anti-Corruption Act. The Network has also supported the Judiciary in its establishment of the Sexual Offences Model Court, it is working with the International Law Book Facility to refresh the Law Library at Fourah Bay College and is pioneering work on reforming illegal wildlife trade.

Despite the fact that the relationship between ROLE UK and UKSLPBN did not emerge as a direct result of the Ebola crisis, this case study highlights how ROLE UK Programme support has been shaped primarily by the strategic direction that the rule of law sector has taken in Sierra Leone. More importantly, as peer-to-peer partnerships adapt to a new global pandemic, the Programme has been able to be flexible in its support to partnerships, as they adapt to changing local, regional and international contexts.

BACKGROUND TO THE EBOLA CRISIS

After emerging from over a decade-long civil war in 2002, Sierra Leone embarked on a period of post-conflict economic recovery and growth. By 2014, the country had made slow but significant progress, with real GDP growth of 15.2% and 20.2% in 2012 and 2013 respectively.⁹ Poverty was reduced from 70% in 2003 to 52% just before the Outbreak in March 2014.¹⁰ Politically, a 'remarkably transparent and well-managed' ¹¹ election in 2012 returned a second victory for the All People's Congress (APC) party and President Ernest Bai Koroma was elected for a second term.

On 23 March 2014, the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported the first cases of Ebola in the rural region of south-eastern Guinea. By the beginning of May 2014, Ebola was spreading quickly through Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone,¹² with cases rising from 16 to 50 in the space of three days in Sierra Leone.¹³ By 9 June, 16 people had died from the disease.¹⁴ On 12 June 2014, the Government of Sierra Leone declared a state of emergency in the Kailahun District, a province in the eastern part of the country where cases had been rising steadily. By June 2015, Sierra Leone had reported more

than 12,900 cases of Ebola and 3,900 deaths.¹⁵

The rapid spread of the virus could be attributed to a number of factors deriving from an overall fragile public health infrastructure in Sierra Leone. First, weak surveillance made it difficult for local health systems to identify and contain the first cases. As cases spread, healthcare facilities taking in patients struggled with a lack of drugs, trained health personnel and appropriate facilities for distancing of patients. This contributed towards a high infection and death rate. Further, the unprecedented pressure on the healthcare system,¹⁶ as well as the death of healthcare workers affected the treatment of other diseases, such as HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria.¹⁷

The epidemic also severely hindered the economic and social progress that Sierra Leone had been experiencing up until 2014. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) suggests that 'in less than six months, what started as a public health crisis in Guinea had degenerated into development crises in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone'.¹⁸ Economically,

the health crisis resulted in the loss of an estimated 74 million US dollars in revenue, partly due to a steep reduction of traditional trading opportunities with neighbouring states,¹⁹ decreased international investment and tourism.²⁰ This resulted in increased unemployment and an estimated increase in poverty by 14.1% between 2014 and 2015.²¹

The health crisis particularly impacted disadvantaged groups, namely women and children. Between 2014 and 2015, children lost 39 weeks of education due to school closures.²² Being outside of school increased the vulnerability of young girls to sexual abuse and pregnancy.²³ Further, due to their traditional role as caregivers, women suffered from increased exposure to the virus, alongside being negatively impacted by the restrictions on economic activity (90% of the female population of Sierra Leone work as informal service providers).²⁴

The Ebola crisis also resulted in adverse political and security implications. The perceived failure of the government to address the virus in a constructive way resulted in reduced confidence in the government and threatened social cohesion.²⁵

Given the localised nature of the crisis, the international community had the ability to prevent, or at least reduce the severity of some of the challenges posed by the Ebola virus during its

early stages. However, and despite being warned by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in April 2014, it took until August 2014 for WHO to declare the virus a public health emergency and trigger international responses. As recently demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the declaration of a virus as a health emergency permits urgent and widespread mobilisation of resources.

After the declaration of the virus as a public health emergency, the international community contributed some funds towards fighting the epidemic, with the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany being the top donors, donating more than US\$3.611 billion by December 2015.²⁶



Richard Honey of the UKSLPBN and Henry Mbawa of Sierra Leone's Justice Sector Coordination Office (JSCO) attend the Network's working group meeting in London in April 2015.

THE NETWORK'S RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

The Ebola virus hit Sierra Leone almost exactly at the same time as the Network was formalised. The initial UKSLPBN meeting happened in March 2014, just as Guinea was reporting the first cases of Ebola. The Network initially facilitated a visit by the Association of Law Teachers to Sierra Leone in March 2014 before the crisis struck.

The unfortunate timing of the crisis for the nascent Network resulted in a number of unplanned challenges, mainly around the delay of activities, the uncertainty around management of the crisis, the lack of physical presence in Sierra Leone and the curtailing of travel. However, the timings also resulted in some unintended opportunities for the Network. The UKSLPBN managed to not only respond to the crisis effectively, by building capacity and supporting the legal community, but it was also able to adapt its work to be the most strategic in adverse circumstances.

This section explores the main ways in which the UKSLPBN adapted to the Ebola health crisis.

THE NETWORK RE-SHIFTED ITS FOCUS

The initial focus of the Network as defined in its first meeting was to:

- establish and consolidate pro bono efforts in Sierra Leone
- develop a coordinated, strategic and operational plan in coordination with the Government of Sierra Leone's Justice Sector Coordination Office (JSCO) that could meet national priorities as identified in the JSRSIP III

A representative from JSCO attended the initial Network meeting, allowing the UK legal professionals to better understand the Government's justice sector needs. The outbreak of the health crisis naturally meant that the Government of Sierra Leone was heavily focused on emergency needs and Ebola recovery. For UKSLPBN, the outbreak meant a curb on deployments, which allowed time for the Network to consider and adjust its priorities to adapt to the changing circumstances brought by the Ebola crisis. The fact that the crisis struck as the Network

was considering its strategy allowed the Network to build flexibility onto its model.

As the crisis ensued, UKSLPBN put work into identifying the legal and judicial needs that were shifting as a result of the Ebola virus.

As one of the members of the Network put it, the ‘crisis allowed the space to choose priorities’. As the crisis ensued, UKSLPBN put work into identifying the legal and judicial needs that were shifting as a result of the Ebola virus. One of the first examples of this was the fact that several commercial contracts were immediately terminated by the invocation of force majeure clauses. In response, the Network worked with the Government of Sierra Leone to assess its technical capacity and understanding of force majeure clauses, and provided pro bono legal advice to the Government on the implications of force majeure for those contracts.

Longer term, the health crisis itself and the economic recession that followed saw several foreign investors withdraw from Sierra Leone and a number of deals fall through. This led the Network to re-shift its main focus to commercial law matters in general, and specifically in aiding the Government of Sierra Leone to revive its economy and attractiveness to investors during and after the crisis.

The Network responded to this immediate need by adjusting its objectives to align both with those set out in the JSRSIP III but also with the general Post-Ebola Recovery Strategy.²⁷ The flexibility of the Network allowed it to make sure its activities remained relevant to the post-Ebola context and to the priorities of the beneficiaries. As such, UKSLPBN adapted its focus to:

- Prioritising the development of an attractive commercial law framework to support foreign investment after the Ebola outbreak
- Closing the gaps in key institutions through capacity building support and developing specialist knowledge in the area of commercial law – particularly in regard to ethics, compliance with international standards on corruption and arbitration
- Strengthening the capacity of the Government’s lawyers to negotiate and manage commercial contracts

One of the primary ways in which the Network contributed to these goals was by publishing an investor guide²⁸ providing an overview of the investment opportunities in Sierra Leone. The guide aimed to tackle foreign investor's negative perceptions of Sierra Leone after the Ebola crisis by presenting a credible and independent perspective from the private sector for the private sector.²⁹

When UK specialists were able to travel to Sierra Leone again, from 24 May to 7 June 2014, the Network was able to support a visit by the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians to Sierra Leone. Later, ROLE UK supported a visit by Retired Circuit Judge David Mackie to the Sierra Leone Fast-Track Commercial Court (FTCC) from 22 November 2015 to 5 December 2015. The purpose of this activity was to a) review the backlog of cases that had piled up as a result of the Ebola crisis, and b) develop an action plan with recommendations to increase the efficiency of the court and increase investor confidence in Sierra Leone.

In March 2017, the Network's shift in focus to commercial law matters during the Ebola crisis and to improving the attractiveness of the Sierra Leone financial sector culminated in a widely attended Summit. The Network, with ROLE UK support conducted a Commercial Law Summit for all stakeholders including the Government of

Sierra Leone, Members of Parliament, lawyers, professionals of the financial and business sector and relevant judiciary members. The Summit laid out a set of recommendations for the Government and legal practitioners to improve the rule of law and socioeconomic development of Sierra Leone after the crisis. Legal and financial practitioners from the UK and Ghana travelled to the Summit to share best practice advice and to discuss how Sierra Leone could improve its commercial law environment.

Following these recommendations and in line with Sierra Leone Judicial Strategic Plan 2016–2018, ROLE UK also supported the Network with the deployment of four experts (one from the UK and three from Ghana) in July 2017 to provide a training aimed at supporting case management for lawyers and judges. The training was delivered through The Judicial and Legal Training Institute (JLTI), which the Network helped to reinvigorate in 2015 (see below).

NETWORK MEMBERS LAID STRONG FOUNDATIONS FOR THEIR WORK

In the beginning of the Ebola crisis, countries began issuing advice against travel to Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone and private companies suspended flights from the region.³⁰ Due to safety concerns, initial travel that had been planned by the Network was paused and deployments were delayed until the situation improved. Although

curtailing of international travel delayed the initial work plans of the Network, it also had an unintended benefit: it allowed the Network to focus on crucial scoping and monitoring work that would later inform (and improve) the activities that took place. One of the Network members stated, 'we were lucky in the sense that when the crisis hit, we were on the planning stage. It gave us time to pause and reflect'. Another member stated 'we used the time when we were unable to travel to plan what we wanted to do, to really set the foundations for firm grounding of the Network'.

At first, the Network closely monitored the legal implications related to the declaration

"We used the time when we were unable to travel to plan what we wanted to do, to really set the foundations for firm grounding of the Network".



Capacity-building training for newly-appointed judges organised by the Judicial and Legal Training Institute in collaboration with the UKSLPBN and the Judicial Institute for Africa in October 2017

of a state of emergency in Sierra Leone, keeping a close eye on potentially risky legal developments arising within that context.

In September 2014, as the crisis continued, the Network hosted a meeting of foreign investors and their legal advisers in a remote consultation exercise that resulted in the identification of priority commercial law and justice constraints to foreign investors in Sierra Leone that would later feed into the development of the JSRSIP III's commercial law and justice component. It is important to note that had the Ebola crisis had not happened, most likely there would have not been time to conduct this reflection exercise as the Network would have moved straight into in-person activities.

This remote consultation, the first in which foreign investors and legal advisors provided input into the national justice strategy of Sierra Leone, laid the groundwork for the legal framework that would later support the attraction of foreign investment. One of the main ways in which this happened was by having the Network call on the Government of Sierra Leone to ratify 'The Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards'.³¹ This Convention is regarded as a barometer of legal certainty and enforcement and recognised as a key instrument in international arbitration. As of 26 January 2021, the Government of Sierra Leone ratified the Convention, becoming the 166th state to do so.³²

As the outbreak was gradually contained, the Network could slowly re-focus on the helping the Government with the development of its justice sector strategy. At the end of March 2015, supported by the former UK Department for International Development's (DFID) LASER,³³ the new Head of the JSCO, attended the Network's working group meeting in London. The aim of this meeting was to ensure that pro bono assistance in Sierra Leone was closely aligned to the Government's needs. The UKSLPBN and the Head of the JSCO collaborated in drafting an offer of pro bono support to the Government of Sierra Leone.

Later in December 2015, ROLE UK also supported the Network in a scoping visit of the Legal Aid Board and the JLTl to aid the reinvigoration of the latter. This needs assessment visit aimed to design a support programme for the Legal Aid Board to be facilitated by the UKSLPBN, to carry out pilot training for paralegals providing legal aid and to discuss broader support for the sector with the outgoing Chief Justice, likely through the JLTl. This training laid the foundations for further core training of 10 new Supreme Court judges in Sierra Leone that happened in 2017, led by six experts from the UK and Botswana. Notably, this training is still relevant today. The Sierra Leone Judiciary is now using the materials from this training to train those magistrates who are full-time judges.

THE INABILITY TO TRAVEL ALLOWED THE NETWORK TO FOSTER MORE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Members of the Network benefitted from the fact that because the Network stemmed from the previous Bar Council Sierra Leone Special Interest Group, there were already channels of communication in place between UK legal specialists and the Sierra Leonean Government and civil society actors. However, due to the constant need for updates on the unfolding crisis, this meant that UK partners were in closer and more regular communication with Sierra Leone partners, as those on the ground had a lot more information about the development of the Ebola crisis and its implications.

As one member of the Network put it ‘we fostered stronger communication links – we were able to know exactly who was doing what and where. This allowed us to position ourselves exactly where things were lacking’. The crisis pushed members of the Network to be in more constant contact which resulted in strengthened relationships within the Network and better planning of activities. One Network member stated, ‘the no-travelling made our communications a lot more effective’.

From January to April 2018, the UKSLPBN assisted the Government of Sierra Leone in its

The crisis pushed members of the Network to be in more constant contact which resulted in strengthened relationships within the Network and better planning of activities.

efforts to implement both the Commercial Law and Justice section of the JSRSIP III and the Post-Ebola Recovery Strategy by seconding a lawyer from HSF to support with capacity building training to develop the legal and technical skills of the Government. As one of the members of the Network stated, this type of collaboration was only possible because during the Ebola crisis period, the Network fostered stronger relationships with the Government and other key stakeholders. The trust that was developed during this period later resulted in this type of secondment being possible.

COOPERATION AROUND THE HEALTH CRISIS ENABLED NEW CONNECTIONS

The Network strengthened itself during the Ebola crisis by taking advantage of the fact that actors that would not have otherwise collaborated were brought together under the context of this emergency.

Although the Network did not organise emergency Ebola-related activities in an official manner (as its members are not health experts), it provided an informal cooperating method for actors to coordinate their individual fundraising and awareness-raising events. For instance, the Network aided in the creation of a Sierra Leone UK Diaspora Response Task Force, which got members together to brainstorm ideas for relief efforts. Further, HSF and the University of Kent (both members of the Network) organised fundraising events to support with the Ebola relief effort.

Members of the Network explained that the crisis built momentum that allowed for new relationships to emerge that were quite specific to the Ebola crisis. In particular, the Network fostered public and private relationships in the UK that would not have otherwise happened. An example of this was the Network's collaboration with DFID, in both London and Freetown, that became strengthened in the context of the urgency of the crisis. Until then, the relationship had mainly been at a formal level. This changed due to the crisis and the

necessity of coordinating efforts. As one of the members of the Network explained, the crisis resulted in more regular, informal conversations between DFID and the Network, which ultimately fostered a closer working relationship.

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Apart from the above specific activities, ROLE UK supported a range of other assignments focused on capacity building of the judiciary, training programmes and institutional support to the Government of Sierra Leone.

As the country slowly relaxed its Ebola-relief efforts (WHO declared Sierra Leone Ebola-free in November 2015)³⁴, the Network was able to re-shift its focus again.

Recently, the members of the Network explained that because the focus on the economic recovery of Sierra Leone is relaxing, the Network now aims to focus on human rights law in addition to commercial law. In particular, members of UKSLPBN are interested in focusing on sexual and gender-based violence, which had not been possible until now, due to resources being diverted to attend to the crisis. This is particularly significant because in 2019, the President of Sierra Leone, Julius Maada Bio, declared a national emergency on rape and sexual violence following a public

outcry over the increasing number of rape and sexual assault cases against young girls in the country.³⁵ As of 2021, the Network is supporting the Sierra Leone Judiciary to establish the Sexual Offences Model Court to ensure that it operates effectively and appropriately and that judges are equipped with the necessary knowledge. The Network has also provided advice to the British High Commission in Freetown on some drafting issues with the 2019 Sexual Offences Act. In March 2020, the Network conducted a seminar with the Sierra Leone Bar Association in which His Honour Judge Simon Carr reviewed the sexual offences legislation after the 2019 Act and offered advice on best practice on the practical application of the Act.



The unprecedented pressure on the healthcare system, as well as the death of healthcare workers affected the treatment of other diseases, such as HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria during and after the Ebola outbreak.

LESSONS LEARNED IN ADAPTING RULE OF LAW PARTNERSHIPS DURING HEALTH CRISES

This short paper offers evidence as to how UKSLPBN adapted to the health crisis in Sierra Leone from 2014 to 2016. Lessons from the Network can be passed onto other partnerships as they adapt to the current COVID-19 context, particularly once the more acute phase of the crisis begins to abate.

UTILISING NON-TRAVEL TIME TO FOCUS ON STRATEGY CAN MAKE LATER IN-PERSON ACTIVITIES MORE EFFECTIVE

The Network utilised the time during which it was impossible to travel to focus on planning activities to ensure it remained relevant to the context. A member of UKSLPBN said ‘the delay in activities helped us to establish the Network so that by the time we were able to travel, we were meeting to discuss previously-identified issues – we could get right into it’.

Making use of the ‘down time’ by thoroughly conducting scoping work and better preparing activities helps to ensure that the time spent in person is used in the most strategic way.

ALLOWING FOR FLEXIBILITY IN ACTIVITIES AND ADAPTING TO THE CURRENT CONTEXT CAN IMPROVE THE RELEVANCE OF PRO BONO WORK

The UKSLPBN benefitted from the fact that the emergency struck in its early days of planning, which allowed it to focus on due diligence.

However, it was the Network’s willingness to adapt its focus completely to the changing context that allowed for its activities to become successful and for the Network to establish its work as indispensable. By immediately focusing on commercial law matters, economic recovery and in improving Sierra Leone’s attractiveness to foreign investors, the Network was able to improve its relationship with the Government of Sierra Leone (as demonstrated by the acceptance of its recommendations during the Commercial Law Summit) and create a longer-term catalyst for change.

As one Network member put it, ‘the economic recovery guide was a catalyst for long-term change, Sierra Leone ministers came back to us as a group to request HSF’s help in developing a

policy reform agenda to tackle the challenges we had identified’.

By building adaptability into the programme of

work and allowing it to re-think its focus to adapt to the current context resulted in increased trust with the Government of Sierra Leone, and consequently improved rule of law outcomes.



Training on Case Management for Lawyers and Judges delivered in partnership with the Judicial and Legal Training Institute in July 2017.

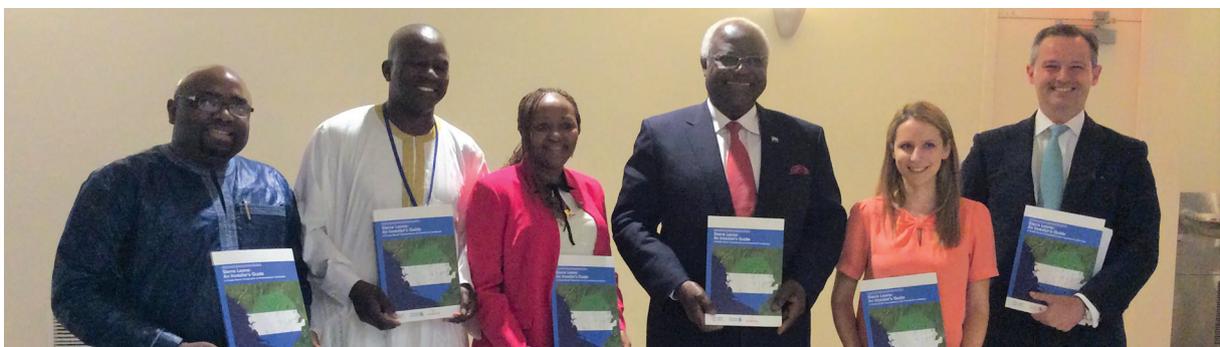
CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

As the world learns to deal with the current COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial that both external pro bono providers and in-country partners attempt to use this time in the most strategic way. Lessons from UKSLPBN's experience during the Ebola crisis showcase that partnerships can benefit from restrictions on in-country activity that may occur during a health crisis to improve their activities and strengthen their relationships.

Moving forward, this review of a peer-to-peer partnership in action aims to feed into the strategic planning of other organisations preparing for the future of international technical assistance involving pro bono work. For UKSLPBN, having experienced one health crisis before has meant

that it felt better prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for the impossibility of travel and uncertainty in planning. One member of the Network explained that the pandemic limited the possibilities of what the Network was able to do in-country but opened up some opportunities to be engaged by participating remotely in discussions. The Network also expressed that the financial restrictions brought on by the pandemic were leveled out by a strong on-the-ground presence, which was made possible by trust fostered during the Ebola crisis period.

It is hoped that as organisations become more adaptable because of the pandemic, their work will be increasingly suitable and relevant to the changing contexts they work in.



The President of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma, and members of the Network present the Investor's Guide for Sierra Leone, in partnership with Herbert Smith Freehills (2015)

NOTES

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² ROLE UK (2020) Rule of Law in Times of Health Crises [online]. Available at: RULE OF LAW IN TIMES OF Health Crises_FINAL.pdf (roleuk.org.uk).

³ The Bar Council Special Interest Group later evolved to become the UKSLPBN.

⁴ Project Umubano was a Conservative Party-supported social action project in Burundi, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. More information can be found here: <https://www.andrew-mitchell-mp.co.uk/sites/www.andrew-mitchell-mp.co.uk/files/attachments/Project-Umubano-Report.pdf>, page 31 onwards.

⁵ In 2010, Herbert Smith Freehills established the Fair Deal Sierra Leone to help Sierra Leone's Government respond to the growing numbers of foreign investment. More information can be found here: <https://www.herbertsmithfreehills.com/fair-deal-sierra-leone>.

⁶ Justice Sector Coordination Office (2015), JSRIP 2015–2018. Available here: <https://jsco.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Very-Final-Draft-Assessment-Report-JSR-SIP-III-.pdf>.

⁷ More information can be found in the 'The Network Response' section.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Government of Sierra Leone (2015) National Ebola Strategy for Sierra Leone. Available here: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/sierra_leone_ebola_strategy_030715.pdf, page 6.

¹⁰ United Nations Development Group (2015) Socio-Economic Impact of the Ebola Virus Disease in West African Countries, page 10.

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¹⁹ Ibid., page 4.

²⁰ Government of Sierra Leone (2015) National Ebola Strategy for Sierra Leone. Available here: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/sierra_leone_ebola_strategy_030715.pdf.

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