Draft Decentralisation Policy - Sierra Leone

*Summary of key Issues and Policy Statements*

# Introduction

The decentralisation policy is a key policy priority of the government of Sierra Leone aimed at deepening decentralisation and strengthening local governance. The policy has been developed with support of the Government of Sierra Leone backed by the European Union through its Project Management Unit. The policy addresses the major strategic challenges facing the development and transformation of decentralisation and local governance in Sierra Leone.

These strategic issues, whose analysis has informed the policy positions in the draft policy include:

* 1. The Confusion over Type of Decentralisation and Form of Local Governance
  2. The Absence of Constitutional Provision for Local Government
  3. The limitations of Political Decentralisation
  4. The Shortcomings of Administrative Decentralisation
  5. The Weakness of Fiscal Decentralisation
  6. The Conflictual Relationship Between Central Government and Local Government
  7. The Weakness of Human Resources Management and Capacity Building
  8. The Lack of Clarity over the Role of Chieftaincy in Decentralisation
  9. The Challenge of Inclusive Citizen Participation
  10. The Insufficient Promotion of Local Economic Development
  11. The Need to Redraw Territorial Boundaries of Localities
  12. The Insufficient Utilisation of Regional Integration and International Cooperation

**Policy Statements**

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| No | Themes | Key Issues | Remarks |
| 1. | **Type of decentralisation and form of sub-national governance** | * The policy proposes to deepen and widen decentralisation at the following levels – regions, localities, chiefdom, Wards and villages. * It proposes further the establishment of Regional Coordinating offices to coordinate and harmonise implementation of government policy relating to non-devolved sectors. * The policy reinforces the role of the local councils as the highest units of democratic decentralisation. | |
| 2. | **Constitutionality of Local Governance** | * The policy proposes to entrench decentralisation and local governance in the constitution of Sierra Leone. It further proposes a number of amendments that will guarantee various aspects of decentralisation including funding, intergovernmental relations and creation of new councils. | |
| 3. | **Political Decentralisation** | * The policy reinforces the role of the Council as the highest political authority in the locality through which the chairperson receives authority to direct the affairs of the locality. * The policy proposes non-partisan elections. * The policy incorporates all paramount chiefs within the locality in the local council to sit alongside elected councillors. | This remains a red flag issue. While there are strong voices in favour within the government (Vice President and Minister of Finance), it is not known whether opposition parties may support this especially the main opposition parties in parliament. CSO voices remain conflictual on the issue non-partisan elections. However, while the problem of partisanship is a source of grave concern, the solution on non-partisanship is unlikely to engender consensus. |
| 4. | **Administrative Decentralisation** | * The policy calls for the strengthening of the Local Government Service Commission. * It proposes the creation of a unified public service where staff in local government can have access to positions in the centre and vice versa. * Local councils to retain the power to recruit in consultation with the LGSC and HRMO. * All staff of councils will be of permanent tenure as the regular civil service. | It is important to note that following the IMC meeting, the Vice President voiced opposition to maintaining the LGSC; suggesting that it can serve the government better to close it and move its functions to the PSC. |
| 5. | **Fiscal decentralisation** | * The policy proposes a separate local governance fiscal policy. * The principle of subsidiarity shall inform the expenditure assignment. * Commits government to a minimum of 5% of domestic revenue as direct transfers to local councils. * Inter-government fiscal transfers will be informed by a formula-based system. * Commits to a 15% national development budget to local council for local economic development. * Local councils will have the sole authority to determine, levy and collect local taxes. * Local councils to enter into loan agreements. | The Ministry of Finance is generally in support of these positions. The minister even suggested that the percentages though places limits on government, may be even very low in actual fact if fiscal decentralisation is done properly. |
| 6. | **Relationship between Central and Local Governments** | * Government to pursue reforms of the central MDAs in the light of decentralisation. * Strengthen the IMC dialogue processes. * MPs to participate in Council meetings as ex-officio members. | |
| 7. | **Human Resources Management and Capacity Building** | * The policy proposes a Local Government Centre of Excellence to promote research and capacity building on local governance. | |
| 8. | **Role of Chieftaincy in Decentralisation** | * The policy calls on government to empower chieftaincy, insulate them from politics and strengthen the governance of Chiefdom Development Committees. | |
| 9. | **Inclusive Citizen Partisan** | * The policy calls for the development of a social inclusion policy to be implemented by local councils and will ensure gender sensitive and gender responsive programming. | |
| 10. | **Local Economic Development** | * This section calls on government to commit to a 15 % of development budget to local councils, promote public-private partnerships and local economic development. | |
| 11. | **Redrawing Territorial Boundaries of Localities** | * The policy (for the first time) proposes a methodological process of redrawing new local council boundaries informed by evidence and need and not politics. * It provides the procedures and minimum level of support for new localities. | |
| 12. | **Regional Integration and International Cooperation** | * The policy recognises the need to promote cross-learning, exchanges and cooperation at the regional or international levels. | |