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**Higher Education and Economic Development  
in Sierra Leone**

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## Abstract

Higher education plays a significant role in the economic development of countries. However, in many African states there is increased investment in basic education while the same is not true for higher education. This paper specifically looks at the case of Sierra Leone a country with a chequered history that suffered from a decade of a very bloody civil war. The war seriously affected the educational sector and the country is still grappling with the process of post-war reconstruction of this once vibrant sector. While the universities are producing the bulk of the skilled workforce of the country, they are faced with a multitude of constraints that makes it difficult for them to effectively contribute to the economic development of the country. The paper makes recommendations as to how some of the challenges faced could be overcome.

Key words: higher education, economic development, human capital and Sierra Leone

### 1.1 Introduction

The euphoria of independence in 1961 brought together young enthusiastic Sierra Leonean foreign trained graduates and professionals who mounted a very solid post-independence political front. However, their lack of political experience and expertise to contain the technicalities and exigencies of governance ultimately led to only a brief period of political stability after which the country was subjected to more than three decades of a chequered history.

From 1991 to 2002 Sierra Leone witnessed a brutal rebel insurgency that led to the death of 55,000 people, with close to a million becoming refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs). The political instability, bedevilled by high level of corruption and mismanaged governance has over the years led to the depletion of the economy thereby placing Sierra Leone at the bottom of the United Nations Human Development Index from 1991 to 2007.

Recent developments due to peace and post-war reconstruction efforts have succeeded in moving the country to rank 158 out of 169 countries in the index for 2010 (UNDP Fact Sheet 2011). Despite this move, Sierra Leone still has one of the highest rates of illiteracy in the world (expected year of schooling 7.2) with a life expectancy at birth of 48.2 years and a Gross National Income (GNI) per-capita of \$809 (PPP, UNDP Fact Sheet 2011). Health and Nutrition outcomes were among the worst in the world: infant mortality (160 per 1,000 live births in 2006); maternal mortality (1,077 per 100,000 live births in 2005) and under five mortality rate (271 per 1,000 in 2005). The incidence of tuberculosis is high (about 628 cases per 100,000 people versus 495 cases for the region). The reported incidence of malaria is high but declining, from morbidity rate of 37.5 (2003) to 35.2 (2005) (World Bank.org: 2011) leaving a small nation with a manageable population and with immense natural resources tongue-tied in the global development debate.

Sierra Leone has the oldest university in Sub-Saharan Africa (Fourah Bay College, founded in 1847) and it has been responsible for the training of people from all over the region. However, due to years of civil conflict, bad governance and corruption, the country's institutions dilapidated drastically as manifested in a highly ineffective non-productive educa-

tion sector. Educational institutions amongst other infrastructure were destroyed in most parts of the country thus creating inaccessibility for many years during and after the war. This led to a large influx of persons from different parts of the country moving into the capital Freetown, fleeing conflict zones to gain access to education. Combined with this was the mass exodus of educators and academics to the West in search of greener pastures. The World Bank in 2000<sup>1</sup> estimated the number of tertiary educated emigrants from Sierra Leone at 52.5%. A significant fraction of those who left never returned and this led to a total breakdown of an academic structure which had once attracted many scholars from all regions in Sub-Saharan Africa. Also factors like unchecked inflation, devaluation and despotic military regimes augmented poverty and posed a very serious security quagmire which permeated into a confluence of unpredictability in the country. This further dwindled the ability of the nation's university<sup>2</sup> to cater for a developing nation or the ability of most parents to afford sending their children to the university.

The youth<sup>3</sup> in Sierra Leone were the hardest hit during the war decade as they were both perpetrators and victims of human rights abuses and violations on a massive scale (TRC 2004)<sup>4</sup>. The civil war that ended in 2002 disrupted the availability and quality of educational services, exposed many youth to violence from a very young age, and created disincentives for young people to remain in school. The situation ultimately led members of the current youth generation to possess less employable skills, be less prepared for the job market and face a more difficult transition to a viable human capital base than either younger or older groups thus translating to not only economic problems but also presents major political and security concerns (NYC: 2011).

This nexus between the conflict and the lack of access and affordability to educational institutions soared the low level of people with higher education in the country. However, the

government of Dr. Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabba which managed to broker a peace deal with the rebels assumed as its top priority the daunting but possible task of rebuilding destroyed socio-political, economic and academic institutions in post-war Sierra Leone. In a bid to reconstruct the educational structure from scratch the government promoted free primary education under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme which was introduced and subsequently institutionalised in Sierra Leone in 2001.

Some of the major contemporary challenges faced in the socio-economic development of the country are linked to the low level of education in the country. Two significant issues this article seeks to identify are how higher education should be tailored to enhance economic development and the actual role it plays in ensuring growth and development in a developing economy.

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1199807908806/SierraLeone.pdf> (Accessed on the 6th of December 2011)

<sup>2</sup> The University of Sierra Leone was the only university in the country before 2005 when it was reconstituted. There are now three Universities, the other two being Njala and Makeni.

<sup>3</sup>In Sierra Leone the age range for a youth is between 18-35.

<sup>4</sup>Vol 3b Chapter 5

## 1.2 The General State of Economic Development in Sierra Leone

To have a clear understanding of what economic development is, there is need to understand the concept of development. Development in the ordinary sense of the word means making a better life for everyone (Peet and Hartwick 2009: 1). Development to many people means essentially meeting basic needs: sufficient food to maintain good health; a safe, healthy place in which to live, affordable services available to everyone; and being treated with dignity and respect (Peet and Hartwick 2009: 1). Amartya Sen insists that development should not be limited to the growth of gross national product, or with the rise in national incomes, or the rise of industrialization, or with technological advancement, or with social modernization. To him development is a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy (Sen 1999: 3). According to Schumpeter (1934:xix) economic development has “three salient characteristics: it comes from within the economic system and is not merely an adaptation to changes in external data, it occurs discontinuously, rather than smoothly, it brings qualitative changes or “revolutions” which fundamentally displace old equilibrium and create radically new conditions. Economic development is accompanied by growth, that is by a sustained upward movement in national income, saving and population. But mere quantitative growth does not constitute development” (Schumpeter 1934: xix).

Almost a decade after the war, the economy of Sierra Leone still remains atrophied and has very little employment related growth. Thus, many people still live below the poverty line with large numbers of youth and ex-combatants unemployed and disenfranchised (Adolfo 2010: 7). This is aggravated by substandard institutions, and a lack of trust in the government adds to the state being unable to consistently control all of its territory and more so Sierra Leone’s coast. This coupled with high levels of corruption means that Sierra Leone’s borders are porous and thus vulnerable to trafficking illicit drugs, small arms and light weapons as well as people (Adolfo 2007: 7).

After the war in a bid to ensure the speedy recovery of already comatosed structures, the International Community played a life saver as they assumed a leading role in facilitating the development of a road-map out of poverty and destitution for the country. One of the leading agencies that assists in coordinating development assistance for the country is the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), established in 1945 after the second world war as the development wing of the United Nations. UNDP provides analytical support to the government, feeding into a detailed policy dialogue as well as the overarching process of development planning. Apart from its critical support to the preparation of the National Recovery Strategy (2003-2005) UNDP and other major development partners with the government engaged major stakeholders in the formulation of the government’s first and second Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 1 (PRSP 1) (2005-2007) and PRSP 2 (2008-2012)<sup>5</sup> which has been transformed to a development manual: a framework of which government ministries, departments and agencies are expected to work in accordance with. The PRSPs have included analysis and projections on emerging issues

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<sup>5</sup>Further discussed below.

such as mitigating the impact of the global financial crisis and managing the inflow of foreign remittances (UNDP SL:2011). The United Nations family in Sierra Leone spearheaded by the UNDP made giant recovery strides in peace building and peace consolidation in post-war Sierra Leone.

A key sector that can help further stimulate the economy and enhance pro-employment growth and development is the agricultural sector. Over 70% of the country's population depend on agriculture as a source of livelihood. Of the 1.43 million hectares of arable land available in Sierra Leone, only forty-eight percent is cultivated (USAID:2011). However, because of the level of illiteracy and lack of access to farming implements, subsistence farming is mostly practiced. There is very little effort made in the area of mechanized farming which could help create a shift from subsistence to cash crop production. Farmers also face challenges especially due to the lack of seeds for farming, tools, storage facilities, access or nearness to market and bad roads. With the limited support farmers receive it becomes evident that the potential of agriculture appears not to have been fully utilized in a bid to ensure food security and augment employment possibilities.

The war and its resultant effects led to mass exodus of the elitist and middle classes. It also by and large saw the outflow of young vibrant professionals of the country's population to more suitable and stable economies many of whom are gradually returning home due to the current government's UNDP sponsored establishment of the Office of Diasporan Affairs

(ODA), which is directly under the Office of the President, whose primary mandate is to repatriate both human capital and economically viable programmes back to Sierra Leone.

However, the high unemployment rate, low remunerations and conditions of service and inadequate social facilities discourage those in the diaspora from returning to the country<sup>6</sup>.

An interviewee Foday Kallon, based in Germany, pointed out some of the reasons why young and educated people were and are still leaving the country:

*'Sierra Leone a country with a huge natural resource base has been turned into one of the poorest countries in the world. People die from curable diseases and most families cannot afford to have one decent meal a day or send their children to school to be educated, or hospital when they are ill. I had to leave after graduating from Fourah Bay College because I knew there was no way I was going to live a decent life in Sierra Leone. The war had rendered the economy useless and the little left is being scavenged upon by politicians. Many of my friends graduate and go for two or three years without getting a job. Where I am I eat and am at peace with myself and I have a family, why should I stay in a country like that when I can live happily elsewhere and never have to worry as to where the next meal will come from.'*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Based on Interview with Aminata Sillah, Deputy Commissioner of the National Youth Commission. Telephone interview conducted on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Interview conducted on the 30th of July 2011 in Frankfurt, Germany.

Mohamed Bangura an interviewee working for the National Revenue Authority in Sierra Leone had this to say when questioned on economic development in Sierra Leone:

*'The socio-economic and political fabrics of the country were completely destroyed and that has negatively impacted growth and development in the country. Sierra Leone is a donor driven country which is still finding it difficult to get on her feet after the war. Unfortunately, most of the initiatives undertaken by government agencies are short term based and not sustainable. They are designed to meet the immediate needs of a very tiny fraction of the population. At the same time the private sector is really small and ineffective. It cannot significantly be of help in the area of employment or growth enhancement. What the country needs are short, medium and long term development strategies that are deliverable and pro-employment based. There should also be heavy investment in the area of education as the level of illiteracy also negatively affects development in the country.'*<sup>8</sup>

In the midst of the challenges faced, successive governments are seen taking giant steps in turning the situation around. A key area of concern is the development of state institutions. Institutions such as the National Revenue Authority (NRA), National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT), Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL), The National Commission for Democracy (NCD), the World Bank sponsored Decentralisation Secretariat (DECSEC) under the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD), the Independent Anti-Graft Agency and the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) were all established after the war to strengthen the machinery of government.

Institutions like the ACC and the HRCSL were created to ensure a shift from 'business as usual'. The ACC is seen minimizing the level of corruption in state and non-state institutions with vested powers of arrest and prosecution of state and non-state actors. The HRCSL identifies violations and abuses by state and non-state actors and assist victims' access to justice<sup>9</sup>.

These viable state institutions form the bedrock of any contemporary African government as weakened or dilapidated institutions can make very little difference in a country as stated by US President Barack Obama in Ghana during his first tour of African states that: *'Africa does not need strong leaders but strong institutions'*<sup>10</sup>. The government is arguing that it will take time for the economy to completely recover but this is possible once the state institutions are strengthened and effective structures in line with the aims and objectives of government are made effectively functional. This point was emphasised by a civilian servant interviewed<sup>11</sup> at the Ministry of Finance in Freetown:

*'The people of Sierra Leone have to realize that nothing can be achieved overnight. We all saw what the country went through and it is the business of every Sierra Leonean to come on board and help make the necessary changes. Government on its part is doing all it can to strengthen the institutions of state and bring in new ones. The initiatives and innova-*

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<sup>8</sup> Telephone interview conducted on the 1st of August 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Telephone interview conducted with Bankole Morgan-Human Rights Officer of the HRCSL on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Speech delivered by Barack Obama in Accra, Ghana on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July 2009

<sup>11</sup> Telephone interview conducted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2011. Name of interviewee withheld as requested.

*tions made will hopefully help to stimulate the economy and help ensure growth and development. The institutions are a key to development and people should not be oblivious of that fact. We will ensure that they get all the support they deserve.'*

In order to curb the surging menace of poverty and socio-economic stagnation in Sierra Leone the current President Ernest Bai Koroma upon ascending to the presidency in 2007 developed with the aid of the UNDP and other partners, the PRSP 2: An Agenda for Change (2007-2012). He targeted five strategic sectors in the country that he believes are of immense significance to economic growth in the country. These sectors are Agriculture, Education, Infrastructure, Health and Energy<sup>12</sup>.

An interviewee<sup>13</sup> at the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning emphasised the significance of the Agenda for Change:

*'The government is very specific on what we deal with at this point. We have identified the five sectors are the most important in the quest to resuscitate our country. Our government is very specific as to what we want to achieve and the methods we will use to achieve them. There are now tangible evidences that we are succeeding. People should not misunderstand this to mean that we are not working on the other sectors. We work on all sectors but the priority is on the five stated'*

With efforts made in improving basic infrastructure in both the energy and roads network sectors, the country is currently witnessing a steady inflow of investment in various sectors with the primary trend setter being the mineral rich mining sector. This sector boasts of high quality diamonds, gold, bauxite, and the recent discovery of off-shore petroleum in the South-West and huge deposits of high quality iron ore in Northern Sierra Leone which has been confirmed by the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources to be the third largest deposits in the world (MMM 2008). After initial disturbances<sup>14</sup> from aggrieved communities companies have settled down. The government passed in 2010 the Mines and Minerals Act to ensure efficient monitoring of mining activities of companies on the one hand and on the other hand enforcing the companies' commitment of mounting effective corporate social responsibility especially in the areas of community development and education<sup>15</sup>.

However, in the face of all these developments the challenges faced are still astronomical as the head of the European Union, Ambassador Jean-Pierre Reymondet Commy, stated in a speech on European Union day (9<sup>th</sup> of May 2011) in Freetown<sup>16</sup>:

*'.....a country which a few years ago hosted one of the biggest peacekeeping forces in the world, is now itself contributing troops to support the peacekeeping mission in Darfur.*

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<sup>12</sup> Excerpt from a speech given by Sierra Leone's Ambassador to Russia H.E John Yambasu on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2011 in Moscow, Russia. See also: <http://www.cocorioko.net/?p=13664> (Accessed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2011)

<sup>13</sup> Telephone interview conducted on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 2011. Identity with held as requested.

<sup>14</sup> Communities especially in the East were worried about exploitation by foreign companies entering their communities and environmental degradation.

<sup>15</sup> Sierra Leone Daily Mail: See: <http://www.sierraleonedailymail.com/archives/323> (Accessed on the 1st of August 2011)

<sup>16</sup> See: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201005171717.html> (Accessed on the 1st of August 2011)



*Indeed, Sierra Leone has come a long way on the difficult transition from post conflict to economic reconstruction and development. But, as we are all aware, important challenges remain, and above all, poverty, and its many obvious faces and dimensions.'*

## **2.1 Global Perspectives on Higher Education and Economic Development**

Several documents and books have been published on the concept of higher education and economic development with approaches from different theoretical and practical perspectives. This study looks at the role higher education plays in the economic development of Sierra Leone.

The education sector is in a particularly difficult situation in sub-Saharan Africa where poverty and its consequences, including hunger, illiteracy, uncontrolled population growth, a deteriorating environment, pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, are part of people's daily lives (Seddoh 2009:2). For several decades, African countries and the donor institutions they work with have placed great emphasis on primary and, more recently, secondary education. But they have neglected tertiary education as an added means to improve economic growth and mitigate poverty (Bloom et al 2005: i).

This has negatively impacted growth and development in the continent and also the interest of people in seeking higher education. The current gross enrolment ratio in the region stands at only 5 per cent, from 1985 to 1989, 17 per cent of the World Bank's worldwide education-sector spending was on higher education. But from 1995 to 1999, the proportion allotted to higher education declined to just 7 per cent. Higher education in Africa has suffered from such reductions in disbursements. Many African countries struggle to maintain even low enrolment levels, and the academic research output in the region is among the world's lowest (Bloom et al 2005: i).

However, in many cases Africa is treated as a homogenous entity with all conditions assumed to be the same in the different countries. Coombe (1991:1) cautions that "Sub-Saharan Africa is endlessly diverse. Conditions vary across countries, within countries, and within universities. The condition of individual universities depends upon such broad factors as the presence of civil peace, the resilience of the national economy, the nature of the national political culture, the policy of higher education and the scope and quality of external assistance". Coombe further insisted that a universal judgment would be simplistic and absurd (1991:1).

This does not mean that the challenges highlighted in the second and third paragraphs are not prevalent in many African countries. The fear is that in generalising the problems affecting the higher education system and structures in Africa, specific existing possibilities are sometimes left out or overlooked with experts forgetting that the challenges faced are not generic. Coombe (1991:1) insists that while African universities face a crisis this does not invariably mean collapse and that the universities have shown resilience. He finely sums it up this way: "The universities remain great national storehouses of trained, informed, inquiring and critical intellects, and the indispensable means of replenishing national talent." This view is backed by Ceyda Özsoy who stated in an article written for the 8<sup>th</sup> Global Conference on Business and Economics that higher education "helps in the

rapid industrialization of the economy by providing manpower with professional, technical and managerial skills...higher education provides not just educated workers, but knowledge workers to the growth of the economy (2008:1)".

Becker and Lewis (1992:23) categorised the contribution of higher education to economic growth as occurring through three distinct interacting functions: firstly the production of knowledge which largely takes place with the major universities through faculty members' and their advanced students' research and creative activities. Secondly, through the "diffusion of knowledge" which may result from external service activities of their faculty, staff, and students. Thirdly, the "transmission of knowledge" through extensive and varied teaching activities (2008:1).

Özsoy further develops on the position of Becker and Lewis by adding that development is supported through higher education in the following areas: income growth, creating new technology, enlightened leaders, expanding choices, increasingly relevant skills (Özsoy 2008: 10-11).

One of the most significant contributions to the advancement of modern higher education is a perspective that the public mission of the contemporary university is to assist in addressing social problems such as improving business organisation and capital investment, protecting the natural environment, preserving human rights and cultural diversity, resolving crises of governance and promoting democracy – all aspects that constitute what can be referred to as the public goods of higher education (Bitzer 2009: xiv). However, institutions have been concerned and have pointed out that what these responsibilities mean in practice and how to go about realising them in any deep or meaningful way should be the subject of legitimate on-going debate and discussion rather than something that can be achieved by uniform measures adopted by decree across the sector (HESA 2010: 5). This perspective gives a broader meaning and responsibility to higher education as not only an agent for economic but also social change. This view is further endorsed by Dr. Tom Nvuyo the Vice Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare who defines higher education as: "the moderator between various sets of economic, political and social demands as it strives to achieve the development of a seamless post-school education and training system with particular emphasis on skills development and the development of a critical citizenry (HESA 2010: 12)."

Eli Bitzer (2009: xii) believes that the educational system in Africa is underdeveloped. As he puts it; "Africa where the field of higher education is still mostly underdeveloped... if, for instance, the disciplinary preparation (for acceptance into any scholarly/disciplinary community) of academics is compared to their preparation for tasks such as teaching as a social practice, learning facilitation, curriculum development, assessing learning, engaging with different communities and managing academic units, much seems to be lacking in South African higher education. And if, for instance, one would ask both university academics and researchers in the field of higher education to define the concept 'university', a variety of mostly tenuous answers would probably be the result."

Seddoh (2009: 2) believes that the low capacity at the higher education level stems from the challenges faced at the lower levels of education; thus "students are not sufficiently

prepared for higher education". Higher education is marked by a low internal and external efficiency that contributes insufficiently to the development of the country, poverty reduction and improvement of other levels of the education system.

Despite the tone of frustration expressed by many authors, Bloom sees a sign of hope: "In recent years, organizations such as the World Bank and major donor governments have conceded that tertiary schooling may have a positive impact on economic development. There are signs of progress for higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa, and some African countries have put in place innovative policies to strengthen tertiary education systems" (Bloom et al 2005: ii).

Looking at the case of Europe, Macerinskiene and Vaiksnoraite (2006) wrote:

"Concerns about expansion of higher education in Western Europe is not a recent phenomenon. Major changes took place in the 19th century that prepared the way for increased participation and, with the acceleration of the process since the end of the second world war, higher education has become de facto part of the national system of education in most European countries. The first priority in the Lisbon strategy for Europe is the realisation of the knowledge society, based on dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy" (Macerinskiene and Vaiksnoraite 2006: 82).

## 2.2 Private Benefits of Higher Education

The private benefits for individuals are well established and include better employment prospects, higher salaries, and a greater ability to save and invest. These benefits may result in better health and improved quality of life, thus setting off a virtuous spiral in which life expectancy improvements enable individuals to work more productively over a longer time further boosting lifetime earnings (Özsoy 2008: 12).

In a global economy, a good college education is not only a springboard to opportunity, but also a prerequisite for our young generation to survive and thrive in the twenty-first century (Liu 2011: 445). The above stated views are similar to views expressed by Lynton Jones<sup>17</sup>:

"In present day Sierra Leone education is the key to personal development. With education you have higher chances of getting a job than without it. The jobs available now require skills that one can only get through the formal education system. The level of salary you get is also dependent on the level of education you have as this is taken into consideration when salaries are fixed".

The high rate of unemployment is linked to the low level of employment in countries like Sierra Leone. In 2008, 58 percent of women and 46 percent of men in Sierra Leone had no education, only 25 percent of women and 28 percent of men had some primary education (SLDHS, 2008). Over 60% of the young people in the country that are of working age are unemployed, making it one of the highest rates in the world (allafrica.com: 2009). With a little or no education it becomes difficult if not impossible to compete for a job in the

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<sup>17</sup> Lynton Jones is an independent consultant in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Interview conducted on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2011 in Freetown.

modern world. This is the challenge faced by many young people living in Sierra Leone and other parts of the world.

### **2.3 Public Benefits of Higher Education**

The public benefits of higher education model is grounded in the assumption that higher education is a social institution devoted to functions such as “the development of individual learning and human capital, the socialization and cultivation of citizens and political loyalties and the preservation of knowledge and the fostering of other legitimate pursuit for the nation-state” (Gumport 2000: 74). Altbach (2005) stated that higher education is an agent for development through its role of producing both knowledge for the public benefit and and educated citizens. These views are shared by Johnson and Hirt (2011: 495) in a study on higher education in Kenya they noted that “the university is an agent of development - not only generating the knowledge, but also disseminating and using that knowledge to drive innovation that is relevant and will answer challenges that are within the Kenyan society”.

The quality of a nation’s higher education system significantly contributes to its international competitiveness. Many countries have made developing higher education one of their top priorities. For example, with the Chinese government’s heavy investment in higher education, the number of college graduates increased from 829,070 to 1, 594,130 from 1997 to 2007 in China, almost doubled in the last 10 years (Liu 2011: 445). Also the importance of higher education is being increasingly recognised in the United States. The US higher education community is striving to meet a new national goal that by 2020 the United States should have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world (Liu 2011: 445). This is based on the belief that the higher the number of graduates the greater the chances of this form of human capital contributing to the economic development of their country. They will have the skills required in different fields that will enable them make a positive difference in their areas of work. Subsequently, this will open up the economy thereby creating possibilities for even those who are not highly educated to benefit from the job possibilities and economic boom that will emerge. An area that has a wide prospect for such emergence is the field of technology as it is very expansive and covers a lot of areas. China and the US are looking at higher education as a possible means to either gain or maintain world dominance in the political, economic and technological spheres.

### **2.4 Human Capital Theory**

The theoretical perspective of this paper is grounded on the human capital theory. Human capital theorists argue that an educated population is a productive population (Okemakin-deand Olaniyan 2008: 158). They emphasise how education increases the productivity and efficiency of workers by increasing the level of cognitive stock of economically productive human capability which is a product of innate abilities and investment in human beings. The provision of formal education is seen as a productive investment in human capital, which the proponents of the theory have considered as equally or even more equally worthwhile than that of physical capital (Okemakinde and Olaniyan 2008: 158).

The theoretical foundation of this paper is based on Shultz (1971) who stated that effective human capital utilization will be of benefit to all of society: individuals, enterprises, communities, nations and regions<sup>18</sup>.

### 3. Higher Education in Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, the higher education sector produces the skilled workforce (human capital) : teachers, administrators, policymakers, planners and the private sector – all of whom are essential and should be in sufficient numbers if a government is to successfully provide and manage the country. The higher education sector refers to universities, colleges, teacher training institutions, and other professional institutes (MEST 2007: 77).

The country has three universities:

(a) University of Sierra Leone which constitutes three constituent colleges, namely Fourah Bay College (FBC) founded in 1827, the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) founded in 1980 and the College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences (COMAHS) founded in 1988.

(b) Njala University College which was established in 1964 (since then, it has served as a major centre for training middle-level agricultural extension workers and teachers at secondary school level) has eight Schools: Agriculture, Education, Environmental Sciences, Social Sciences, Community Health Sciences, Technology, Forestry and Horticulture, and Medical Sciences. The College together with the Bo Teachers College, the School of Hygiene and the Paramedical School in Bo, constituted Njala University as an autonomous body, with Bonthe Technical Training College (BONTECH) and Institute of Advanced Management and Technology (IAMTECH) as affiliate tertiary institutions<sup>19</sup>.

(c) The newly established University of Makeni (UNIMAK) which was formally a catholic training institution called Fatima Institute has been transformed this year into the University of Makeni.

The table below gives an indication of the number of students enrolled into tertiary institutions from 1998 to 2005. It shows a steady increase in the number of students that are enrolled each year. The number more than doubled from 6,429 in 1998/1999 to 16,625 in 2004/2005.

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<sup>18</sup>In: Liepe, Z. and Sakalas, A. (2011): 'Evaluation Methods in Human Capital' Economics and Management, ISSN 1822-6515, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania.

<sup>19</sup> See: <http://www.njalauniversity.net/schools> (Accessed on the 2nd of August 2011)

**Table1: Tertiary Institutions Enrolment Trends, 1998/99 to 2004/05**

Year	Males	Females	Total	%Female
1998/99	4,164	2,265	6,429	35
1999/00	5,398	2,752	8,150	34
2000/01	6,381	2,614	8,995	29
2001/02	9,123	3,772	12,895	29
2002/03	9,521	4,329	13,850	31
2003/04	10,128	5,369	15,497	35
2004/05	10,558	6,067	16,625	36

**Source MEST in MEST 2007:77**

These students are trained in different faculties; for instance the College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences (which is a constituent college of the USL) offers courses in the following fields:

Pharmacy: Diploma in Pharmacy Technician, BscHonours Part I and II

#### **Basic Medical Sciences**

Basic: Preliminary Year, 1st year, 2nd Year and 3rd Year, Diploma in Medical Laboratory Sciences, (BSc in Pharmacology, Anatomy, Physiology etc. used to be offered but were discontinued and are scheduled to restart soon)

#### **Clinical Sciences:**

Medicine: MB Ch B (Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery) Degree Part I and II, Certificate in Community Medicine and Diploma in Community Medicine

**Nursing-** Certificate in Nursing, Diploma in Nursing, and BSc in Nursing, Ophthalmic nursing and psychiatric nursing.

**Table 2: The number of students per year from 2000 to now and per faculty as follows:**

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Clinical</b>	<b>Pharmacy</b>	<b>Nursing</b>	<b>Total</b>
2000/2001	94	52	3		149
2001/2002	154	88	5		247
2002/2003	176	74	3		253
2003/2004	252	110	3		365
2004/2005	320	53	8	5	386
2005/2006	370	52	71	362	855
2006/2007	394	89	51	377	911
2007/2008	469	69	132	402	1092
2008/2009	482	95	85	266	928
2009/2010	526	67	80	418	1091

**Table 3: Year and number of students admitted into Fourah Bay College**

No	Year	Number of Students admitted
1	2004/2005	812
2	2005/2006	1712
3	2006/2007	997
4	2007/2008	916
5	2008/2009	1063
6	2009/2010	1369
7	2010/2011	1509

**Data collected from the Registry of Fourah Bay College in August 2011**

In the higher education sector, teacher training colleges have recently been converted into polytechnics. Five of these institutions offer comprehensive training programmes at primary education level: Port Loko, Makeni, Bo Teachers Colleges and former Bunumbu College now called Eastern Polytechnic and the Freetown Teachers College. The former Milton Margai College of Education (MMCE) now upgraded into a polytechnic called Milton Margai College of Education and Technology (MMCET) is more advanced as it produces teachers for

both primary and secondary schools and offers a Bachelor in Education programme. Njala University trains teachers for secondary education in the Faculty of Education. At a more advanced stage, the Fourah Bay College campus of the University of Sierra Leone offers a

Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Joof 2006: 3).



#### 4. Challenges faced by the Higher Education Sector and their subsequent effects on the economic development of Sierra Leone

Although the universities are contributing significantly to the economic and other sectors of the countries (especially in the production of the major part of the work force for both the public and private sectors) they are faced with a plethora of challenges. These challenges do not just show the shortfalls of the universities but also factors that mitigate or limit their ability to fully contribute to the economic development of the country. The higher education sector is also viewed with different perceptions by persons interviewed for this paper.

The bulk of government and donor investment in education in Sierra Leone is focused on basic and not higher education. This level of concentration is not limited to Sierra Leone but widely spread across Africa as emphasised above by Bloom et al (2005: i). The scale of programmes like the SABABU Education Programme<sup>20</sup> launched by the government of Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabba in 2002 to rehabilitate basic education and provide vocational skills throughout Sierra Leone (Bu-buakei Jabbi 2007: 5) have not been seen happening in the higher education sector. This creates a sense of the government having less interest in higher education and only keen on promoting basic education.

Another dire challenge faced based on interviews for the paper is the perception that the administrations of the universities are unnecessarily heavy-handed and student unfriendly.

An interviewee who is at the clinical stage of his studies at the College of Medicine stated in an interview:

*'The academic system in my college is very student unfriendly. Lecturers find pleasure in failing students and it is almost like they pre-arrange to have a certain number of students' pass and the other number fail. I am surprised normally to see the names of promising, brilliant and hardworking students who end up failing. What the college does not get is the fact that the country is in dire need of doctors and they should be encouraging rather than discouraging medical students. At the end of the day the dreams of the students are not only killed but a country is left with far fewer doctors than she deserves.'*

Similar sentiments were expressed by Bangaly Monorma Bah<sup>21</sup> a lawyer trained at the Law School in Freetown:

*'Studying in institutions of higher education in Sierra Leone can be very frustrating. There are very intelligent students who are discouraged and are left with no option but to travel out of the country to pursue their academic goals. Most of them do not end up returning because of the bad memories. What I simply cannot understand is why the academic system cannot be restructured to ensure that lecturers are fair with students and treat them as human beings. The power dynamics existing is used at the disadvantage of the student and subsequently the country.'*

Interviewees who have gone through or are going through the universities are very critical of the kind of courses offered and the inability of the institutions to introduce newer and more progressive courses. These courses can be tailored to meet the demands of changing times and the growth and development that the country craves for.

Robert Paine<sup>22</sup> added during his interview:

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<sup>20</sup>The SABABU Education Project was initiated in 2002 as collaboration between the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL), the World Bank through the International Development Agency (IDA), and the African Development Bank through the African Development Fund (ADF)(Bu-buakeiJabbi 2007:5) .

<sup>21</sup> Telephone interview conducted on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2011.

*'Courses offered at the Universities of Sierra Leone and Njala are old and have not been revised for a long time. The Universities are also unwilling to introduce new courses that will have direct link to development in the country. I thought I was being educated while at Fourah Bay College but was a bit shocked when I started a Masters' programme in Florence, Italy. Courses offered are well structured and linked directly to the actual needs of the job market and the development programmes and processes of countries. Lecturers are well informed and up to date with a good blend of academic and field experience. With FBC, the notes that were given to people I know who were there ten years ago are the same that were given to me when I was there. We end up using the old notes of our friends instead of attending classes and we called them 'academic legacies'.*

An interviewee<sup>23</sup> of the Njala University also expressed frustration at the courses offered there:

*'The courses are not inspirational and the materials given are old and outdated. Lecturers play "God" and they instill fear into students rather than getting the students to appreciate lectures and modules. What we look forward to is to finish the four years and move away to better education systems in the West or other African countries (if we get the opportunity). After three years of studies I still feel so unprepared to face the real world. I talk to most of my friends and they tell me the same. When we finish the course and enter the real world we would still not be academically sure of our selves'.*

This challenge was recognised by the former Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Sierra Leone who in his public statement on the website of the University wrote in 2007:

*'Courses are now being reviewed and updated and where necessary obsolete courses are withdrawn from the curricular to give way to more recent courses that reflect present day needs of the local and international communities. The new University of Sierra Leone gives great importance to maintenance of standards and quality control so that our graduates can compete equally in the job market both locally and internationally' (TUSOL.org 2007)<sup>24</sup>.*

One of such new programmes introduced according to Mr. Alimamy Conteh<sup>25</sup>, a lecturer at Fourah Bay College, is the Peace and Conflict Studies Programme that is meant to help consolidate and maintain the existing peace in the country:

*'The Peace and Conflict Studies Programme because of its relevance to the actual needs of our country in particular and our world in general attracts more students than any other programme at the University of Sierra Leone. Similar courses can be introduced or some of the modules that are part of the Peace and Conflict Programme can be expanded upon and turned into programmes on their own. The country is in dire need of such programmes.'*

However, an interviewee<sup>26</sup> who is a staff of the University of Sierra Leone stated that:

*'Much more could be done by the University but our system is so old and bureaucratic that we just sit and feel comfortable with the ways of old. We have a lot to contribute to the*

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Paine is the Conflict Manager of the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC). Until recently he was a part-time lecturer at the Peace and Conflict Studies Programme, Fourah Bay College. The interview was done through telephone on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Name withheld as requested. Telephone interview conducted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2011

<sup>24</sup> See: <http://www.tusol.org/services>. Accessed on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 2011

<sup>25</sup> Telephone interview conducted on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 2011

<sup>26</sup> Name withheld as requested. Telephone interview conducted on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 2011

*nation's development but we are not doing it. Most of the pro-change statements made by the heads of our institution are empty words that they are not willing to work on.'*

Other interviewees accused the universities of not being action and result oriented. Some interviewees indicated that the higher education system does not have the flair to make a difference in the country. Munde Mbayo<sup>27</sup>, a former Pure and Applied Sciences student at Fourah Bay College who graduated in 2004 but now residing in Maryland, USA, had this to say when interviewed:

*'When you look at universities like Legon in Ghana, Ibadan in Nigeria or Cape Town in South Africa you see that they contribute immensely to the socio-economic and political development of their countries by proffering solutions to problems affecting their nations. Lecturers write articles on key questions of the day, engage political stakeholders constructively on issues of national concern and proffer solutions to problems affecting their countries. In Sierra Leone, most lecturers care only about the little money they make from consultancies not about issues of national concern. The Universities look 'soulless' and have very little contact with the nation they are meant to make a difference in. However, one cannot blame the lecturers but the government for they are poor and it is normal for them to find extra means of putting food on the plates of their families and sending their children to school.'*

However, Brima Karl Samura took a different standpoint from that of Munde by arguing that the university would want to do much more but is tied by the high level of political interference that comes from government officials. Practically he says *'the Universities have no autonomy for the government pushes them towards the direction they want them to be. Administrators at the universities are practically told what they should do by politicians. The 'state of autonomy' claimed does not exist in the true sense of the word. This is due to the fact that the government funds the universities and as the old saying goes 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'<sup>28</sup>.*

This point was rebuffed by Robert Paine<sup>29</sup> who stated that *'the level of government interference is only becoming higher because the administrations of the universities are weak and cannot stand up for what they believe in. The universities as places of knowledge and enlightenment should be the entities helping to guide politicians towards the right direction rather than being told what to do by selfish politicians. The government can fund Universities but that does not mean they can use them; if the universities are determined not to get used by politicians they will not be used. They should know better than them.'*

Quite critical this may seem but one would be forced to think that with the meager remuneration package for lecturers and the universities receiving a very slim budgetary allocation from government it becomes difficult for them not to be subjected to its whims and caprices. The salary of a junior lecturer at the University of Sierra Leone including allowance is about le 1,100,000 which is less than \$250<sup>30</sup>. In a recent strike action that intensified in July the Academic Staff Association of Fourah Bay College proposed that 'professors are to be paid seventeen million leones, while senior lecturers and lecturers are to receive between nine to thirteen million leones' (Cotton Tree News: 2011). The strike was called off in November 2011 after the government agreed to meet the demands of the lecturers through a gradual salary increment process in the coming four years.

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<sup>27</sup>Telephone interview conducted on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 2011 with Munde Mbayo who is a staff member of the University of Maryland.

<sup>28</sup> Telephone interview conducted on the 4th of August 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Robert Paine.

<sup>30</sup> Telephone interview conducted with Alimamy Conteh on the 4th of August 2011.

Some of the politicians were part of the university system and they are skilled at manipulating familiar territories. Manipulation could be done in influencing admissions processes and its policies and programmes in influencing the appointment of people into certain offices in the universities.

To augment the human resource base of the university system in Sierra Leone, the government of Nigeria through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate of Technical Aids Corps (TAC) makes annual deployments of qualified manpower to the judiciary and tertiary institutions in Sierra Leone. The Directorate of TAC and the Commonwealth signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to collaborate in the implementation of capacity building initiatives through the provision of manpower to less developed members of the Commonwealth. The TAC programmes has recorded successes as every facet of university education is catered for: Engineering, Pure and Applied Sciences, Arts and the Humanities, Medicine and Law<sup>31</sup>.

Another major challenge the universities face is that they are ill-funded and do not seek or have the capacity to move towards self-sustenance. This does not come as a surprise as the economy is still in an unstable state with a significant portion of it being donor driven. However, this has serious negative consequences on the programmes and calendar of the universities. There are regular strike actions undertaken by junior and senior academic staff of the universities which most often lead to the halting of classes and subsequently student being in disarray or going home until normalcy is restored. As earlier mention the Academic Staff Association of Fourah Bay College unter took a strike action in July 2011 that only ended in November 2011. The strike affected the college's calendar as it had to open on the 3<sup>rd</sup> fo December 2011 instead of its normal opening month (October). The Junior Staff Association were also on strike while the Academic staff association were on strike.

A student<sup>32</sup> of Fourah Bay College interviewed reported a recent strike<sup>33</sup> action organized by the staff of his college:

*'The better part of the end of May and July 2011 saw the staff of Fourah Bay College refusing to partake in academic activities. Classes were put on hold with the staff moving around looking for any lecturer that would dare try holding classes. It most often turns out to be a spectacle with students hanging around in dismay as staff vents out their frustrations.'*

The continuous strike actions affect the morale of the academic staff and the status quo of the universities leading to lecturers seeking part-time or full-time jobs to alleviate their financial condition.

The universities also face the challenge of having limited capacity to conduct research. This is mostly due to the fact that the universities are not research-based or cannot afford to undertake researches and most of its modules are not tailored to include research components.

The low financial support base of the universities render them incapable of undertaking research programmes or establishing functioning research laboratories or departments.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Interview with Aminata Sillah.

<sup>32</sup>Name withheld as requested. Telephone interview conducted on the 3rd of August 2011.

<sup>33</sup>There were regular strike actions in 2003/04/05 and 2009/10 which saw academic calendars disrupted with students going on holidays later in August rather than July and classes commencing later rather than in early October.

<sup>34</sup>Interview with Lynton Jones.

At the same time the level of non-degree trainings undertaken by the Universities is quite low while the demands for such trainings are very high<sup>35</sup>. Many employers now prefer the focusing of resources on demand-driven formal sector training and skills up-grading of their employees through short term specific training (MEST 2007:62). While IPAM conducts some trainings for business executives, Njala is seen less engaged in training agriculturists apart from those that are part of their normal academic programmes. One may argue that this does not necessarily fall within their mandate but any university operating in a post-war reconstruction context should have the initiative to undertake such activities rather than only focusing on what their normal mandate calls for especially when the nation and the wider world is currently facing the ever growing threat of food insecurity<sup>36</sup>. Organisations like Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and various International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) are working alongside the government on agriculture related programmes. There is need for Njala University to create possibilities collaborate with these world agencies to augment the food security campaign ongoing in Sierra Leone.

An interviewee Kelfala Kamaraa graduate of FBC now the Manager of Eco-Bank Sierra Leone Waterloo Branch stated that the infrastructures of the Universities are poor and insufficient. He made specific reference to the laboratories and the libraries. In his own words:

*'The infrastructures of the constituent colleges are poor, there are insufficient classrooms in the institutions and students are seen running around or crowding in the little available classes. In some classes you have more than 100 students crowding into a small room; especially in the Social Sciences and Arts faculties. Lecturers cannot handle the classes as they get rowdy and uncontrollable. Most of the libraries have books that are old and of little relevance to courses taught. The inability of students to access proper laboratory facilities, access up-to-date libraries with relevant books affect their general output later in life. They end up not having full grasp of the subject matters and how to connect them to real life situations'.*

Similar sentiments were expressed by Robert Paine<sup>37</sup>:

*'It is impossible teaching some courses at the University of Sierra Leone. The classes cannot hold the number of students accepted into them. At the end the students and lecturers are all frustrated. The facilities are really poor and should be drastically improved upon to enable possible expansion in terms of number of students accepted into them,'*

However, recent improvement has been recorded in this area as there is a current drive by the University of Sierra Leone to improve on its infrastructure and save the face of the University. At FBC, the construction of the Strasser King building which now houses the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law offices and also with its 300 sitting capacity Eldred Jones multi-purpose Hall, rehabilitation and refurbishment of the John. F. Kennedy building, face lifting of the Engineering Building are examples of these improvements.

Njala whose Taiama and Bo campuses were destroyed during the war were rehabilitated and a new building put up in Henry Street in Freetown. While the recent developments are encouraging there is need for further improvements to be made so that the growing rate of students can be readily absorbed into the University system.

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<sup>35</sup>It should be noted that there is on the increase private study centres that facilitate online courses for professional courses such as the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA).

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Aminata Sillah the Deputy Commissioner of the National Youth Commission of Sierra Leone.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Robert Paine.

Table 1 draws on a very sensitive issue, that of gender parity. The intake from 1998 to 2005

indicates that females make up less than 40% of the students. The gender disparities are even

more glaring at the universities, and in faculties like Engineering and Pure & Applied Sciences (MEST 2007:77). The reason for this was explained by Yeama Bishop-Robinson<sup>38</sup>, a gender expert:

*'Some of the courses especially in the sciences are rigorous and tailored to fit men. Courses such as civil and mechanical engineering are mostly designed for men and women find it difficult to excel in them. So most of them shy away from such courses and opt for more female friendly courses. At the same time the application process into the institutions are not encouraging to women. This is mostly due to the fact that the process is tedious and even with the same qualification more men get accepted.'*

Nevertheless, looking at the gender question it can be easily noticed that the Universities are not primarily responsible for this gender gap as it can be seen as a general African phenomenon as girls at an early stage are engaged in domestic and commercial activities which narrows their chances of going to school. For most African traditional beliefs schools are meant only for boys. Organizations like the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), UNICEF, UNESCO, a host of local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work on reversing gender disparity in Sierra Leone. The gap is even

more glaring at national administrative level as women make up less than 30% of those in government employment state actors. What the universities can do is to devise mechanisms through which they can further encourage women to go to apply to university programmes. Such mechanisms could include, tuition waivers for those who girls who cannot afford and those who have exceptionally good entrance requirements, slightly lower the requirement for women to ensure more intake of them. They should also ensure that they are given equal chances as men.

The UNDP sponsored Career Advisory and Placement Services (CAPS) programme is a comprehensive service (linked to the youth employment strategy) offered to educational institutions to facilitate: job internships and placements; selection of training programmes and academic majors; world of work awareness; recruitment and job placement and job and career workshops (UNDP 2011). The system was based on successful experiences in Liberia, Senegal and Ghana. Two CAPS centres have been established at the Universities of Sierra Leone and Njala.

## Conclusion

As could be seen above the universities contribute to economic development in Sierra Leone. This they do through the production of the work force and building their capacity. However, the universities are underperforming and thereby contributing less to the socio-economic and political development of the country than they should. The above stated challenges are rooted in two factors (a) insufficient funding received by the institutions (b) inability of the institutions to initiate programmes through which they could fund some of their activities and reduce the burden on the government. This is also coupled up with the state of the national economy and the inability of the public and private sectors (due to low

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<sup>38</sup>Yeama Bishop-Robinson is the head of Women's Advocates, an NGO in Sierra Leone. Telephone interview conducted on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 2011.

absorption capacity) to provide employment for graduates who in some cases leave to seek better career prospects in other countries.

From all indications, the institutions of higher education do not have the drive or the financial capacity to be involved in innovative exercises that are in line with nation building and economic development. Government alongside officials of the universities are perceived to be less pro-active and not taking the right steps in improving the status of the universities. The government concentrates most of its education budget on basic education thereby ill-funding higher education. This leaves the universities with only the possibility of carrying out normal programmes and little freedom to operate out of those borders.

For this to change there should be an increase in the level of support the universities get from the government and other agencies. More funds should be made available to the faculties and departments of the universities to expand on research and training programmes. This is an area that funding agencies and the private sector can play a leading role. At the same time the universities could be encouraged to create programmes through which they could raise funds to ensure sustainability.

Courses available in the universities are mostly 'traditional' courses that have gone un-reviewed for many years. Some of the courses are not in tandem with modern day development needs and have not been shaped to meet new demands. New courses (with the exception of a few) have not been established as the universities do not have the initiative, financial capacity or the human resources to do this. However, Fourah Bay College took a good step when they introduced the Peace and Conflict Studies Programme in 2002 after the war. The programme remains the most applied to programme at FBC since its inception. Courses such as Development Studies, Social Work etc. should be introduced at undergraduate levels both at the Universities of Sierra Leone and Njala. The courses offered at teacher training colleges should also be revised to ensure that they are in line with changing times. New courses plus the revised old ones would help put the products from the institutions in a better position to contribute to the development of Sierra Leone.

There are very limited research programmes undertaken by the universities. This has tremendous effects on the graduates of the universities who end up not having the ability to conduct scientific research. It also has negative effects on the country as the universities do not conduct research on general challenges faced in the country and proffer solutions based on the conclusions of the researches. Without such scientific evidences the universities are not in a position to advise on critical issues faced in the country or even serve as a whistle blower when crimes are committed.

Also, the inability of the universities to engage in research has significant impact on the kind of researchers that it produces. Most employees lack the ability to conduct scientific research as they get no or very little training in this area. Thus, they end up providing information that is either inaccurate or made-up. Government can also invest in researches geared towards technological improvements and development in agriculture. In most cases instead of bringing in experts from abroad, the capacity of those available at the universities could be enhanced, by giving them the chance to carry out research exercises.

The above stated challenges could also be linked to the poor or rather scanty and insufficient infrastructural facilities of the universities. They lack research laboratories that could be used by students to develop research skills. Where the structures are available the required equipment is often not available.

A significant part of the infrastructural problem is the lack of classrooms. This does not only frustrate the lecturers, but also renders teaching ineffective. The lack of infrastructure affects national development as most qualified students could not be accepted into the

universities because of their low absorption capacity. Qualified applicants not accepted are left angry and frustrated and end up engaging themselves in activities they do not have interest in but do only to keep themselves busy as their 'dreams have been killed'.

The inability of the universities to organise training programmes (non-degree) for the general workforce in collaboration with the public and private sectors affects the ability of the workers to build on their knowledge. The exception is the Institute of Public Administration and Management that organizes training programmes and short courses for business executives. Additional training programmes should be introduced in all institutions that target the different levels of the country's workforce. This will further improve the capacity of the labour force making them more effective and efficient. It will help them get a blend of office and further academic skills development. The universities could work with the private and public sectors to enhance this.

There is very little investment in the universities by the private and public sectors. Njala University which is an agriculture focussed institution can be meaningful in the drive towards mechanized farming. Research and the establishment of more technical programmes could be positive interventions that Njala could undertake. Unfortunately, there is very little involvement by the private sector in this area.

The universities lack the initiative to aggressively seek funds from external sources. The over-reliance on government funding has not helped the course of the Universities. Support gained from other sources can ease the dependence on government and also minimize the level of political interference that the government officials exert on the universities.

A major stumbling block to the growth and development of the human resource base of the universities is the poor condition of service (services include housing and medical facilities) and salary of the staff. Most academics leave for other countries as they believe that their possibilities in life would be limited by their continuous stay in Sierra Leone. A huge community of Sierra Leonean intellectuals could be found in different countries in the West. To discourage this westward migration the universities and the government should improve on the salary scale and conditions of service of their staff. There should also be a revision of policies dealing with human resource development in the universities. This will not only help to retain those present but also encourage those in the diaspora to return.

While the institutions of higher education are said to be autonomous there is still a lot of government interference from politicians. Policies should be developed that discourage the level of interference from state actors. The autonomy of the universities should be seen to be a reality and government could play its role in ensuring that it carries out its financial obligations without using that as a string to subject the universities to its whims and caprices.

Government with the help of its donors should increase the number of grants available for students. Scholarships should be given on the basis of merit to those who are talented and actually need the scholarship. They should be distributed evenly across the regions of the country and the process should be open and transparent. However, increased access should be matched with improvements in the quality of the education system.

The concept of gender has to be mainstreamed into all policies and programmes that target higher education. Girls and young women should be motivated and encouraged to obtain higher education. This could be done through the introduction of scholarships and tuition waiver programmes for outstanding girls and young women.

While it is up to the universities to be innovative and try to make a difference in the country, the government should also be seen making an effort in linking the universities into its general development plans. This is not suggesting that efforts are not made in this area -



it means that much more needs to be done. The universities could be a major force in the drive towards sustainable growth and development in Sierra Leone and they should be encouraged and assisted to enhance their possibilities.

Alongside changes recommended at the universities, the teacher training institutions have to be given more financial and technical support than they currently get. This will put them in a better position to produce teachers that would improve the quality of learning the pupils get.

The correlation between the service of the universities in a country and its economic development cannot be overemphasized. As could be seen from the above stated the state of the economy in the country has a direct effect on the universities and the limited ability of the universities to improve on its output is also directly affecting its post-war development processes.

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