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Corruption Trends and Graft Control Progress in Sierra Leone: Study of Causes and Remedies

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Abstract: Corruption continues to affect the vast majority of Sierra Leoneans and is regarded as the greatest culprit of poverty, inequality and social cohesion. This publication shed light on corruption trends, control measures, causes, development implications and remedies for combating corruption in Sierra Leone. The data for this article was sourced from secondary/desk review. The secondary data sources were mainly from published articles, government reports, Acts, policies, workshops and conference proceedings, newspaper commentary, Transparency International Annual Reports, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports, and NGOs among others. Key words like corruption in Sierra Leone, causes of corruption, negative effects of corruption and bribery, and control measures of corruption were used to search for relevant information. Specifically, the study revealed that corruption was more prevalent from 2003 to 2018 but declined from 2018 to 2021. Most corruption cases in Sierra Leone arise from the abuse of public offices for private gains. Furthermore, systemic analysis of literature showed that corruption arises as a result of low salary wages, political ambition and other sociological factors. From 2019 to 2021, Sierra Leone has made remarkable progress and is been rated below Africa's corruption average. This might be attributed to the various reforms and the pre-conviction corrupt asset recovery strategy adopted and the massive public outreach and awareness-raising drive adopted by the commission. It is recommended that the Anti-Corruption Commission of Sierra Leone be adequately empowered to go after any individual engaged in corrupt practices regardless of social status, ethnicity, political connection and wealth. It further recommended that the Anti-Corruption Commissioner appointment should not be political but by integrity and sound track record of citizens.

Keywords: *Corruption; Sierra Leone, Government, Civil Servant, Corruption Perception Index, Graft Control.*

1. Introduction

Although there is no universally agreed definition of corruption globally, some schools of thought have, however, defined corruption as the improper and unlawful behavior of public individuals (civil servants & politicians) while holding public offices. It could also be defined as an abuse of power for a selfish gain against the public interest (Atuobi, 2007). Corruption in developing countries has been the major reason why those countries are taking the back seat in economic development, infrastructure, technology, employment and human capacity development. Across Africa and Sierra Leone, in particular, corruption is threatening the social, economic development and the peaceful co-existence of citizens (Duri, 2021). A school of thought, argues that corruption in Africa has the mechanism to negatively influence smooth government activities and functions (Andvig, 2008) while Hope (2017) stated that corruption tends to negatively affect the health and other vital government sectors in Africa. According to Javed (2020), corruption has affected over 25 million children across Africa alone. In Sierra Leone, corruption has led to gross inequality, unequal wealth distribution, unfair service provision and a major barrier to the economic development of the nation since its independence in 1961 (Javed, 2020).

Critics argue that Sierra Leone's sustainable development and advancement have been plunged by Colonialism, Civil war, Ebola outbreak, Covid-19 Pandemic and rampant corruption. As such, corruption has stolen the future of youth and potential leaders of tomorrow in Sierra Leone. The attempt to combat corruption in Sierra Leone is proving difficult due to the fact that corruption has made many individuals more powerful and famous; hence having the power to attract more people into politics and by extension increasing their political party's numbers. As such, those who resist any form of corrupt practices in the public sphere are faced with constant threats and intimidation and in some cases summary unlawful dismissal. Apparently, corruption issues and discussions are a sacred topic among politicians and civil servants in Sierra Leone. The mentality of most civil servants in Sierra Leone is that "state" properties are not theirs; hence embezzling and or looting these properties or resources so that they could be converted into their private properties or resources is now the motive of the most civil servant in the 21st century (Adjiboloso, 2005). Most corruption reports over the years have been left to swallow dust on shelves.

But that is changing now with the current new Anti-Corruption Commission leadership. Although "The Anti–Corruption Commission" (ACC) was established in 2000, however, the country has not been graft-free over this period and the commission was considered a little more than a paper tiger. As a result, corruption was/is rampant and endemically rooted in Sierra Leone due to weak institutions, inadequate fines, political power and the mindset of public servants. Despite the millions of dollars of international technical assistance and aid poured into Sierra Leone over the past decades meant to improve the standard of living of average Sierra Leoneans, the country had been languishing at the bottommost section of the international corruption rankings body globally especially from 2001 to 2017 (Roberts, 2020). Corruption is the major driving force behind the abysmal performance of Sierra Leone's economy since independence. Before the civil war in 1992, Sierra Leone was operating on a free-fall status in terms of corruption and autocracy (Kpundeh, 1994). Over this period, corruption among government officials and politicians became a religion where everybody practice it in favor of personal gains. The rampant scale of corruption in Sierra Leone is intrinsically linked with the deplorable state of development condition the country is stocked in and the low wages of public servants. For instance, the poor condition of service in critical sectors of the nation is a recipe for bribery and grand corruption (Samura, 2016). Over the past two decades, most government mega projects in Sierra Leone were considered white elephants and national loan disbursement was diverted to the personal bank account of the rich influential politicians at the expense of national development.

In turn, ordinary citizens are feeling the wreck of sub-standard quality of service being provided by municipalities, contractors, engineers and medical practitioners due mainly to heavy kickbacks demanded by government officials. Before 2018, the fight against corruption was seen as an impossible fight as the act flourished and persisted with grand corruption among public officials. According to the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, Section 13 paragraph C Act No. 6, the ACC is mandated to "protect and preserve public property and prevent the misappropriation and squandering of funds belonging to the Government, local authorities or public corporations" The commission is empowered to investigate corrupt practices and subsequently punish corrupt culprit in the move to suppress and permanently eradicate corruption in Sierra Leone. This paper seeks to assess the dynamic trend of corruption, driving forces, development implication and graft control measures and remedies instituted in curbing corruption in Sierra Leone. This article seeks to answer the following research questions: 1) what is the status of corruption in Sierra Leone: 2) what are the driving forces behind corruption in Sierra Leone: 3) what are the implication of rampant corruption in Sierra Leone: 4) has there been any progress made in the fight against corruption in Sierra Leone: 5) what are the remedies instituted in eradicating corruption out of Sierra Leone. The answer to these questions will address the knowledge gap on corruption-related matters in Sierra Leone. The rationale of this publication can offer good insight into corruption and its driving forces in Sierra Leone and beyond.

2. Review of Relevant Literature

Many scholars have published articles and newsletters about corruption and its role in shaping the development landscape of Sierra Leone. For instance, Potter and Bankole (1998) discussed and identified corruption predisposing factors in Sierra Leone. The authors further analyzed and discussed reform policies geared towards improving corruption in Sierra Leone. Chene (2010) conducted an overview of corruption in Sierra Leone and concluded among others that, corruption infiltrates almost all sectors of the country. Kpundeh (2000) assessed the effort puts in place to control corruption in Sierra Leone in the near future. The author concluded that; politicians, military junta regimes and civil servants are the key culprits engaged in the exploitation of government revenue via emptying the coffer meant for both social and economic development (Kpundeh, 2000). Similarly, corruption and reforms in contemporary Sierra Leone were investigated by (Kpundeh, 1993). The author systematically assessed the various effort employed by the military regime in the mid-90s to tackle corruption in Sierra Leone. Kpundeh (1994) further investigated the prospect that can limit administrative corruption across Sierra Leone and proffer solutions to end administrative corruption in Sierra Leone.

Reno (1995) comprehensively reviewed state politics and corruption in Sierra Leone and revealed the driving forces in state politics. The book highlights how some politicians and powerful business individuals demonstrate absolute authority in controlling mineral resources in Sierra Leone. According to Kpundeh (1993) nations like Sierra Leone have over the years endured an array of in-depth and rampant corruption.

Over the past decades, corruption was regarded as the way of life (Hors, 2000) and the easiest way to make wealth in Sierra Leone. This mentality is, however, common among politicians and civil servants. This mindset has paved the way for persistent corruption hence holding Sierra Leone at the bottom of the international corruption ranking index to languish for decades (Roberts, 2020). Based on academic research and policy perspectives, it is a consensus that corruption is very high and costly in low-income countries (Olken, 2012) like Sierra Leone. Wei, (2003), estimated that moving from a relatively clean" government like that of Singapore to one as corrupt as Mexico's would have the same effect on foreign direct investment as an increase in the marginal corporate tax rate of 50%. Corruption has held nations with huge mineral deposits captive by transforming these minerals into a 'resource curse'. According to this literature, low wages in the civil service encourage petty corruption, and the imbalance between the supply of, and demand for, public services likewise create opportunities for corruption in Sierra Leone.

Also, individuals tend to invest in a career in the public service, given the shortage of opportunities in the private sector, thus increasing the likelihood of their involvement in corrupt practices. Society has learned to live with it, even considering it, fatalistically as an integral part of their culture. Not only are public or official decisions affecting individuals but the clandestine award of government contracts and the often little or no access to public service or the exercise of a right of citizens in obtaining civil documents are mostly abused. Civil servants who refuse to toe the line are removed from office; similarly, business individuals who oppose it are penalized vis-à-vis their competitors get contracts while they are ignored (Hors, 2000). In recent times, greater attention is being given to the problem of corruption, especially in developing countries like Sierra Leone than it was in the past (Wei, 2003); and this era has seen a remarkable expansion in economists' ability to quantify corruption (Olken, 2012). Corruption has not only affected the standard of living of citizens in developing countries but has caused political instability, civil conflicts, massive demonstration as seen in Haiti and Cameroun and Equatorial Guinea among others.

Most developing countries like Venezuela, Mexico, Haiti, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Angola and many more are struggling with corruption scandals, and political instability amidst a declining economy due to rampant corruption. Robinson (1998) asserted that corruption is regarded as a sensitive political and economic agenda across the world. Sierra Leone has endured a systemic pattern of corruption traced back to 1962 just after independence (Kpundeh, 2000). According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report in Sierra Leone, corruption was the major reason for the outbreak of the 11 years of civil war that kills thousands and lefts hundreds amputated. Although many scholars have undertaken research on various graft-related issues in Sierra Leone, however, most scholars downplayed the negative development implication of corruption, driving forces, progress made and the suitable mitigation option require to eradicate corruption in Sierra Leone. This article is poised to bridge this gap and provide adequate information about the current trend of corruption and the various graft control measures being instituted to reduce graft activities across Sierra Leone. This article will contribute to knowledge on the aspect of corruption and its related consequences in developing countries.

3. Research Methodology

Sierra Leone is a small low-income West African nation with a population of approximately 7.8 million people (World Bank, 2009). Sierra Leone is rich in mineral resources such as Diamonds, Gold, Rutile, Bauxite, Iron ore, Chrome and many more and is endowed with substantial natural resources such as croplands, forests, rangelands, freshwater, wetlands (swamps), biodiversity, wildlife, extensive fisheries (Blinker, 2006). Additionally, Sierra Leone faces multi-dimensional challenges: (1) economic challenge of stagnation, volatility and unemployment; (2) social challenge of corruption, poverty, inequality and precarity; (3) democratic challenge of polarization, patronage and institutional inefficiencies; (4) environmental challenge of biodiversity loss, land degradation and climate breakdown. Sierra Leone is characterized by high youth unemployment, illiteracy, poverty and corruption (World Bank, 2020). The country has been previously named among the most corrupt nations on earth but that is now changing since 2018.

Study Metrics: The methodology adopted for this article was desk review. Documents of interest were: published articles, newspaper commentary, Transparency International Annual Reports, Government documents including Acts, Policies, and Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports, NGO corruption

reports, and workshop proceeds conferences among others. Ex-Government Corruption Transition Report from 2007 to 2018 was also analyzed.

Data Collection: The data for this article was sourced from secondary sources. Key words like corruption, bribery, negative effects of corruption, and corruption in Sierra Leone were used to search for relevant information.

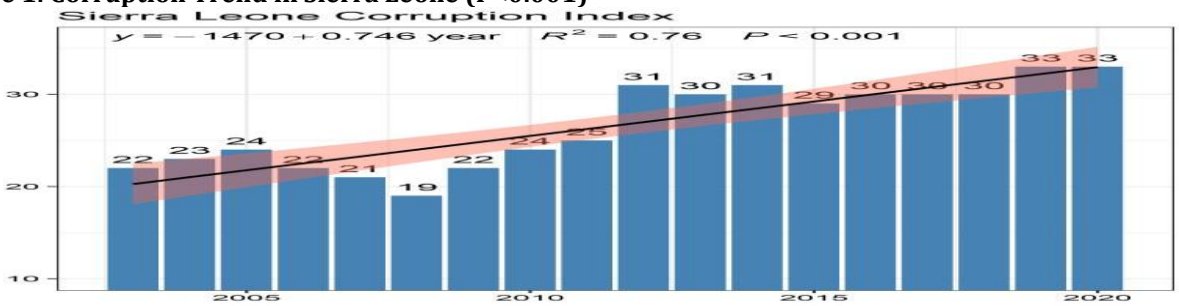
Data Analysis: Data collected from the document analysis was sorted to extract relevant information that formed the results and discussion aspect of the article. The Descriptive Statistical Analysis was done using the R software version 4 to predict the trend of corruption ranking in Sierra Leone. The results are presented in simple frequency tables and figures.

Organization of the Article: The article is organized as follows: Introduction; Review of literature, Materials and Method; Study metrics; Data collection; Data analysis; Trend of corruption in Sierra Leone; Corruption in state institutions; Effects of corruption on the economy; Corruption in the education sector; politicians and corruption in Sierra Leone; Causes of corruption; Corruption and its role in igniting the eleven-year civil war in Sierra Leone. Ex-Government Corruption Transition Report from 2007 to 2018; Progress in the fight against corruption and the way forward for Sierra Leone in eradicating grand corruption.

4. Trend of Corruption in Sierra Leone from 2002 to 2020

Over the past two decades, corruption in Sierra Leone has been an internecine activity resulting in abject poverty of the masses. The impact of corruption in Sierra Leone is shaping the ever-changing trend in poverty, social injustice, inequality and the sustainable economic development of the country (Samura, 2016). Rampant petty corruption activities in Sierra Leone are particularly popular among traffic police officials, finance and procurement officials. Procurement officials, for instance, overprice needed office equipment and award hefty procurement contracts/binding to close relatives, friends and political party loyalists and allies. The Sierra Leone Anti-Corruption Act was established on the 3rd February 2000 and later renamed the Ant-Corruption Commission on the 1st of January, 2001, nonetheless, it was considered by many as a tiger paper prior to 2018 (Roberts, 2020) From 2002, the fight against corruption was viewed derisory by the masses and the corruption index rating was wavering between 22 to 19 corruption indices; the lowest in the world (Fig 1). However, from 2010, the index rating slowly increased especially from 2018 to 2020, but the country has a long way to go in the fight against corruption. The fight against corruption is not yet over in Sierra Leone, nonetheless, the current rigorous trend of fighting corruption is remarkable and assuring as seen in (Fig 1).

Figure 1: Corruption Trend in Sierra Leone (P<0.001)



Corruption and State Institutions in Sierra Leone: In Sierra Leone, corruption is widespread and a way of life (Hors, 2000) especially for those in authority to an extent that most individuals are more powerful than some state institutions altogether. Corruption has served as an economic barrier undermining the country's potential in delivering inclusive economic growth needed to foster sustainable development. Critics argue that state institutions like the Supreme Court and other powerful organs like the Anti-Corruption Commission are not totally free from corruption in some cases. Kawusu, (2012) stated that political corruption in Sierra Leone involves the manipulation of political institutions for personal gain and the deviation from the rational-

legal values of the modern state. Together with weak and arbitrary governance, weak protection of civil liberties and inadequate regulatory and legal framework to guarantee property rights, political corruption deprives Sierra Leone of needed productive investment and growth (Kawusu, 2012).

The Anti-Corruption Commission of Sierra Leone was established in 2000 by an Act of Parliament to mainly investigate rampant corruption and to prevent the re-occurrence of the civil war that was due mainly to corruption. However, critics believed that the institution itself is corrupt citing the salary of the past and current commissioners capable of paying 50 or more civil servants. Critics believed that the institution has not lived to its full expectation and has been politicized to an extent that it only arrests ordinary citizens who commit minor crimes while allowing influential politicians to get away with corrupt practices worth millions of dollars. For example, the former Mayor of Freetown city council was involved in serious embezzlement amounting to billions of Leones (Millions of US Dollars) but was only charged 120 million Leones ($12,000) which was not even 1% of what the mayor embezzled simply because the Major was from the ruling party as at that time. Also, Valentine Collier, a former ACC head was sacked in November 2005 for alleged involvement in corrupt practices. In October 2007, the chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission was removed from office for doing very little in fighting corruption. The inability of government institutions to fight corruption at a local, regional and national level has earned Sierra Leone the status of Least Develops Countries title.

One of the most corrupt nations on earth. Most government institution workers operate AA a syndicate to exploit the very poor they are supposed to serve. Thus, corruption and other aspects of poor governance and weak institutions have substantially hindered the economic growth of Sierra Leone. Kawusu (2012) warned that institutionalized political corruption has become a necessary economic backbone for the state elite. The author further opined that ''political corruption is negatively or inversely related to good governance. Critics argue that the very institution designed to fight corruption has been struggling to live up to expectations and that shows how deep corruption is engulfed, Sierra Leone. Since independence, government institutions have been considered the most corrupt sectors in Sierra Leone. The 2020 audit service report of Sierra Leone alleged that the office of the president was involved in some clandestine corrupt activities. The police force of Sierra Leone has always been in the spotlight in connection with corrupt practices. Similarly, government ministers, permanent secretaries, directors, Mayors, city chairpersons and local chiefs have all been alleged to be engaged in corrupt practices and abuse of offices since independence.

Corruption in the Educational Sector: Sierra Leone was once considered the epitome of educational civilization and fulfillment in West Africa in the 18th century. The nation was acclaimed as the "Anthem of Africa" educationally. Sierra Leone was, ranked the best among competing universities as a result of the rich curriculum especially in Greek and Latin (Jackson, 2015; Paracka, 2002). During this period, the tertiary education system in Sierra Leone outperformed other higher learning institutes across West Africa before and after independence. However, that glory has long faded away and was replaced by poor academic performance and examination malpractice among students. These might be attributed to corruption, underdevelopment in the educational sector, civil war, poverty catastrophic events like Ebola, and the Covid-19 pandemic among others. Corruption and abysmal performance in public and local examinations in Sierra Leone are intertwined. According to Thomas (2017), most students in Sierra Leone are brained washed those grades and admission to higher education institutions can be bought.

Academic corruption in the form of cheating in the examination across major higher learning institutions and school leaving examinations (West Africa Senior Secondary Examination (WASSCE) is the order of the day in Sierra Leone and other West African countries. The corrupt staff of some of these institutions connives with students to leak examination information in exchange for monies and other demands. In most cases, learning materials supposed to be supplied freely to schools are instead being sold to local vendors on the street (Campaign for Human Rights and Development International (CHRDI), 2017). Over the past few years, examination questions (WASSCE) have been sold to students by teachers prior to the commencement of the examination date. In some cases, rich students pay an intelligent student to take the examination on their behalf while other students are taken to secret locations and allowed to write their examinations using an open book in exchange for a hefty sum of monies. The implication of these actions is felt in the high school dropout rate, the poor performance of university students, a weak educational labor force, a high illiteracy rate, and an increase in crime, violence and ill-educated future leaders.

Effects of Corruption on the Economy and Standard of Living of Average Sierra Leonean: In the 1970s, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Malaysia, Ghana and other nations had more or less the same economic status and GDP. At this time, these nations especially Singapore is far ahead of Sierra Leone in terms of development and economic strength. Corruption held Sierra Leone static for almost three decades without progressing economically and socially. Within this period, however, few individuals acquired huge wealth while the masses standard of living deteriorated exponentially. In Freetown, the capital city today, the increase in the cost of education, health services, food and other basic commodities has given an advantage to a few elites and high-income earners in the city but to the detriment of the majority of the citizens earning low income (Kawusu, 2005). According to the recent UNDP Human Development Index ranking, Sierra Leone is placed 182 out of 189 and categorized among the 10 least developed nations on earth and below the average of Sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP, 2020). About 60% of the population of Sierra Leone lives on a mere US$ 1.25 a day due to widespread poverty in the country as a result of corruption (UNDP, 2020).

Also, the Human Capital Index (HCI) ranks Sierra Leone 151 out of 157 nations in 2019 (HCI, 2019). The country's population is characterized as young—with around 45.8 percent of the population below the age of 15 and 74.8 percent below the age of 25 (World Bank, 2020). The 2021 life expectancy for Sierra Leone stands at (55.18 years) a slight increase from 2020 54.18 years (https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/SLE/sierra-leone/life-expectancy). Sierra Leone has the fifth-lowest life expectancy rate in the world (51 Years). Sierra Leone's poverty rate stands at 56.8 % but remains high (78.5%) in rural areas (World Bank, 2020; Trosclair, 2017). Kpundeh (1997) cautioned that corruption in Sierra Leone is manifested in all categories of government-appointed positions of responsibility. Bitong, (2005) stated that in Sierra Leone, corruption is illegal but no one is willing to give it up yet. Rampant corruption activities across various public and private sectors have denied Sierra Leone the opportunity to experience economic development and advancement other nations like Rwanda are enjoying.

Politicians and Corruption in Sierra Leone: On the global stage in recent times, we have seen influential and powerful politicians such as Jacob Zuma, former South African President, former South Korean president Park Geun, Brazil's former President Luiz Inaciao Lula de Silva, Nawaz Sharif (Former Pakistan Prime Minister) found guilty and jailed for corruption. British politicians Jonathan Aitkin and Jeffery Archer were also both in prison for corruption. On the contrary, politicians who looted stated resources are instead celebrated in Sierra Leone. Any attempt by the ACC to arrest such individuals in Sierra Leone usually meets protest and stiff resistance from the political party's loyalists and tribal men. Hence, it is believed that the easiest way to make illegal money in Sierra Leone is by being a politician or closely connected to a powerful politician. Most politicians believed that they are above the laws of the land because they can never be prosecuted and if they do their charges are nothing to worry about. This mentality over the years has made politics an attractive career, especially for the younger generation whose parents acquired illegal wealth through politics.

For instance, the former Chief of Staff of the Sierra Leone government, former Vice President and former Mayor of Freetown City Council were all accused of corruption on issues with explicit evidence that qualify for imprisonment but they are all walking free and living luxurious lives with their looted wealth. ''*Corruption has become a culturally accepted phenomenon; though we may not say corruption is the sole domain of Sierra Leoneans. But let us admit it, we are corrupt*'' (Mansaray, 2018; Kpundeh, 1997). For instance, the invitation of the former president of Sierra Leone for questioning by the ACC in connection with some corrupt practices stimulated a strong protest by his clan's men and party loyalists. Corruption has been the main reason why Sierra Leone is among the poorest nations on earth even though the country is endowed with plenty of minerals with a low population. ''*Judging by the reactions of people on social and mainstream media, it is irrefutable that corruption has gone from a mere act of bribery to a complete state of mind and way of life. It seems to have become so acceptable that, any hint to tackle it is seen as a treasonable offense*'' (Mansaray, 2018). However, Sam (2018) cautioned that ''*Corruption is a complex and multidimensional problem that requires total commitment if it is to be defeated*''.

Causes of Corruption in Sierra Leone: The causes of corruption within the political arena of Sierra Leone range from sheer greed to low wages of public officials and sociological factors. But irrespective of the causes, a common characteristic of this obnoxious activity is politicians acquiring wealth and prestige through a

system of predatory accumulation (Kawusu, 2012). The establishment of a one-party state system of governance in 1978 was the start of deep-rooted corruption maneuvers in Sierra Leone (Thompson, 1997). During the fourteen years of rule of one-party system governance, corruption reached its peak level and was said to be widespread among politicians and civil servants (Thompson, 1997). Over-expenditure and tribalism are among the other factors contributing to rampant corruption in Sierra Leone over the past decades. According to Chene (2010), the root cause of the eleven-year civil war was a result of corruption. Other root causes of corruption in Sierra Leone have been weak institutions, meager fines, low salaries and a civil servant mindset on bribery, bureaucratic regulations and political affiliation (Chene, 2010).

Corruption and its Role in Igniting the Eleven-Year Civil War in Sierra Leone: Six years after Sierra Leone's independence in 1967, a functioning democracy met its premature end with the election of an opposition party. From 1978, the country degenerated further into a one-party state with high-level corruption that the nation has ever seen due to the discovery of Diamonds. Since then, the economic decline continued unchecked with few individuals becoming very wealthy and powerful. Consequently, the skyrocketed rate of corruption and injustice led to the outbreak of the civil war that finally wrecked the already weak economy while at the same time destroying colonial infrastructures. *So endemic was corruption that the government was simply expected by all sides to use state resources to advance the interests of its supporters* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, 2003). According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report (2004), the main reason for the outbreak of the civil war was corruption, injustice, and political oppression among others. From 1968 to 1992 Sierra Leone was ruled by a one-party system and this system was alleged to have looted immerse unaccounted wealth. Because of the corrupt practices of powerful politicians in those days, the economy of Sierra Leone crumbles and has since not recovered. The high level of unequal benefit distribution resulting from diamond sales angered and frustrated ordinary Sierra Leonean under President Steven's Government. Proceedings or revenue from the Diamond sales through National Diamond Mining Corporation that was jointly steered.

DeBeers' ventures were solely used for the personal enrichment of the president and his government allies and the few elites close to him (Federico, 2007). Minerals such as Diamonds are abundant in Sierra Leone and their mining started way back in the 1930s, but because of corruption, there is nothing much the country can boost having that those other nations with Diamonds do not have. Corruption of those in positions of responsibility within the diamond industry is also obvious (Rodgers, 2006). The country lags behind today in all aspects simply because of corrupt individuals and institutions who were supposed to uphold the values and welfare of the country and its people. During the British rule, Sierra Leone had a functioning train connecting strategic parts of the country but soon after independence that train seized operation because of corruption and mismanagement by its management staff. The rampant misappropriation of government funds, unemployment, inequality and unequal distribution of wealth and economic deterioration left the youth population with no choice but to join the civil war and fought the government as rebels. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels enjoy most of their support from citizens' dissatisfaction with the corrupt governments that were in place since Sierra Leone gained independence from Britain in 1961 (Hirsch, 2001). In addition, Rodgers (2006) ascertains that during the eleven-year civil war, RUF was supported by mostly corrupt and incompetent systems in Sierra Leone.

Ex-Government Corruption Transition Report from 2007 to 2018: The March 2018 elections saw a peaceful transit of power to the incumbent government of Sierra Leone. The major reason for their ousting was alleged to be closely linked to corruption and unequal distribution of wealth, especially from the country's mineral resources among other reasons. According to the government transition report (GTR, 2018) ''*Reckless spending, facilitated by the unrestrained use of the Government's overdraft privileges at the Bank of Sierra Leone, was the norm, leaving the economy substantially burdened by debt*'' The use of tax payer's money on personal development was the order of the day for most civil servants in Sierra Leone during this period. The government transition report further discloses millions of Leones taken as loans by top government officials who in turn refuse to pay. Such loans and credits were canceled as bad debts by the same government officials. The reports also found a good number of financial transactions appeared to be marred by corruption as well as conflict of interest in connection with former top government officials (GTR, 2018). Furthermore, the report unearths many fraudulent contracts that were given to incompetent people who failed to deliver. Moreover, these failed contract individuals were, however, given other enviable

positions in the Government while others were merely dismissed from their positions and allowed to walk freely with the millions they stole or misappropriated. For example, in 2013, a $15 million arms deal was awarded to the best friend of the then Minister of Defense for the supply of military vehicles to the army but the Audit Service Sierra Leone report 2014 found that the said contract was over the price at $6.1 million (ASSL, 2014).

Progress in the Fight against Corruption Since 2018: In Sierra Leone, the fight against corruption has been complex due to political, tribal, cultural, mindset and weak institutions. However, recent strides in making corruption unfashionable are gradually paying off in Sierra Leone. The country has taken bold steps in tackling corruption through the development of legal frameworks that enable the commission to prosecute corrupt crimes. Since the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Act, Sierra Leone has only been rated below Africa's corruption average in 2021, 2020 and 2019 respectively (Table 1). For instance, Sierra Leone was ranked 3rd among 35 African Countries surveyed in 2019. This rank placed the country ahead of all West African nations (Sandi, 2019). The Corruption Perception Index (CPI) ranked Sierra Leone 129 in 2018; 119 in 2019 and 117 in 2020 respectively. Similarly, the Afro Barometer Corruption Perception Survey shows that the fight against corruption in 2019 has climbed to 66% as compared to 40% in 2015. In addition, the National Corruption Perception Survey conducted in 2019 shows that 92% of Sierra Leoneans are convinced that Anti-Corruption Commission is serious & dedicated to reducing corruption in the country (Jalloh, 2022).

Similarly, the citizen's perception of corruption prevalence declined to 40% in 2020 as compared to 70% in 2015. In 2020, Sierra Leone Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) scorecard recorded 81% on the "Control of Corruption" (Sandi, 2019). Table 1 present the yearly corruption ranking of Sierra Leone from 2003 to 2021. The country's ranking is far above the global and African corruption average rankings. However, the country has been ranked below Africa's corruption average since 2019. Nonetheless, the country is still far from reaching the global average in the fight against corruption. A pre-conviction corrupt asset recovery strategy adopted by the Anti-Corruption Commission in Sierra Leone is serving as the best model for recovering looted monies from corrupt politicians and civil servants (Kaifala, 2021). Furthermore, the embarking of the commission officials on public outreach country-wide and awareness-raising is positively shifting the paradigm of government and non-government officials' perception of corruption. Government officials are educated on what constitutes corruption through various outreaches being conducted country-wide by the commission. Recently, the ACC has introduced a compensation scheme for reporting corrupt practices across the country.

Table 1: Development of the Corruption Index in Sierra Leone 2003 – 2021

Year	Sierra Leone Corruption Ranking	Africa's Average	Global Average
2021	66	67.9	56.8
2020	67	67.5	56.7
2019	67	67.6	56.8
2018	70	67.5	56.9
2017	70	67.9	56.9
2016	70	68.5	57.1
2015	71	67.7	57.5
2014	69	67.4	56.8
2013	70	67.9	57.4
2012	69	66.7	56.8
2011	75	70.7	59.7
2010	76	71.1	59.9
2009	78	71.3	59.7
2008	81	71.4	59.8
2007	79	71.5	60.1
2006	78	71.5	59.1
2005	76	71.4	59.1
2004	77	70.8	58.3
2003	78	71.3	57.6

Source: (https://www.worlddata.info/africa/sierra-leone/corruption.php).

5. The Way Forward for Sierra Leone in Eradicating Grand Corruption

Sierra Leone is among the 48 least developed countries in the world that largely depend on international aid but corruption remains a cross-cutting issue that affects service delivery and standard of living. The article revealed that the corruption trend in Sierra Leone is on the decline as compared to early 2000. The majority of corruption activities across the country emanate from gross abuse of public offices for private gains. The driving forces behind corrupt practices in Sierra Leone are closely linked to low salary wages, political ambition, the mindset of civil servants, greed and other sociological factors. Great Nations like the US, China, the UK and Canada, etc. have taken bold steps in fighting corruption and today their footprints are noticed everywhere around the globe. The model used to fight corruption in these countries should be borrowed and implemented in Sierra Leone. The extradition of criminal culprits should be enacted and their monies and properties confiscated after being found guilty. If corruption is not tackled now, the future generation of leaders will be worst and the country will plunge into permanent ruin. For a corrupt-free society, the anti-corruption commissioner's appointment should not be political. The commission should be empowered in terms of finance and human capacity to act independently. The government should put punitive measures in place to deal with any public servant and Minister found or engaged in corrupt practices. Allocating contracts based on friendship, relationship and party connection should be discouraged and those engaged in such practices should be prosecuted.

The Anti-Corruption Commission of Sierra Leone should be adequately empowered to go after any individual found wanting regardless of his/her position or connection in the Government; the culprit should be brought to justice. The commission should improve on its public outreach engagement, and develop the pre-conviction corrupt asset recovery strategy already in place. The commission should sign more memorandum of understanding with important sectors and undertake more reforms to strengthen the institution's capability in handling corrupt cases. Massive corruption awareness campaigns should be undertaken regularly alongside Civil Society Organizations (CSO) and NGOs to sensitize the general public about the negative impacts and dangers of corruption to the nation, citizens' welfare, economy and standard of living. As such, regulations, norms, policy framework and transparent procedures, prosecution protocols and crimes committed should be made public. Lastly, the fight against corruption should be collective in a way that everybody should put their hands on deck to report, resist, and stop the "Dutch disease" that has held the country backward since independence. This study will serve as a baseline for future research on corruption and its consequences in developing countries and inform policymakers on the direct and indirect causes of corruption in Sierra Leone.

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