

The March 27th Run-off: The Swing of Kono.



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THE CONTEXT

Kono District is a diamond-rich district in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone. Koidu is the district headquarter town. The other major towns in the district include Motema, Yengema, Tombodu, Jaiama Nimikor and Sewafe. The district is the largest diamond producer in Sierra Leone. The population of Kono District is 505,767¹. Kono borders Kenema District to the southwest, The Republic of Guinea to the east, Koinadugu District to the northeast and Kailahun District to the southeast. Kono District is divided into fourteen chiefdoms, and largely occupied by the tribe bearing its name – the Konos. The ethnicity is quite different in the major towns, like the District headquarter, Koidu which has a cosmopolitan state with diverse tribes and multiple nationalities. The Lebanese and the Marakas from The Gambia are the foreign dominant who had come in the

¹ See 2015 Population data: https://www.statistics.sl/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/final-results_-_2015_population_and_housing_census.pdf

early seventies and settled to find and mine diamond. Majority now buy diamonds and as well contribute largely to diamond smuggle and blood diamond mining (during the war).

Before the civil war, Kono District had a population well over 600,000 people; however, it experienced devastation during the Sierra Leone Civil War, which forced many of the residents out of the district. The district was heavily looted and constantly fought over due to the rich diamond reserves in the area.

As a natural resource endowed country, mining has always been of a vital importance to Sierra Leone's national economy. There is also vast fertile land for agriculture and significant marine resources. However, due to structural mismanagement, the weakening of national and traditional institutions and indiscriminate misuse of the country's natural resources exacerbates a number of ills that include pervasive poverty, bad governance, and human rights abuses. Rather than being the driver of economic growth, Sierra Leone's natural resources have become the hold back for many of its citizens particularly, the host mining communities.

There was need for a democratic reform in the country, therefore in 1991, the Joseph Saidu Momoh's APC government drafted a new constitution which passed through a referendum and was adopted into law for Sierra Leone to become a democratic state – thereby enshrined into the constitution the establishment of a representative presidential government system. The war was on its way, creeping into the country from the east end, making it impossible to hold any election. Other pundits have argued that, even with the new constitution, then President Momoh who was handpicked by Late President Siaka Stevens to succeed, was not showing signs that he would leave office soon. So, the opposition thought of using the barrels to gain power; thus, President Momoh was butted out of office by the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) Government. The junta government ruled unto 1996 when concession was reached to install a democratic government. Before that could happen, the first junta leader who had overthrew the President Momoh, Captain Valentine Strasser had consistently refused to hand over power, as was promised during his accession to power. It is reported from regime insiders that the now retired Brigadier Julius Maada Bio conducted a palace coup, taking power from Strasser and restoring democracy. In the same year, 1996, there was a general election in Sierra Leone which was fiercely fought in a runoff between the then UNPP and the SLPP, but as it was probably determined, the SLPP won thus installing Late President Ahmed Tejan Kabba's SLPP Government.

THE SWING DISTRICT STATUS – How All began?

During the first rounds, the parliamentary system was the 'District Block System'. So, political parties were formed along regional lines. The Kono's had their own party – the Democratic Citizens Party (DCP) – which was led by Hon. Abu Aiah Koroma, the late father of the now First Lady of Sierra Leone; Mrs. Sia Nyama Koroma, wife of president Ernest Bai Koroma. That young

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political party, the DCP was able to win all the seats in Kono districts, thereby establishing its iconic state in determining the president – then, it became known that Kono decided. Because the fight was strongly between a northern based party, the UNPP led by John Karifah Smart and the South Eastern based party, the SLPP led by Ahmad Tejan Kabba. The first government, the SLPP established in 1996. But was overthrown by another faction of the military in 1997, the AFRC junta government led by Johnny Paul Koroma.

Tejan Kabba's government was restored in 1999 with the help of the ECOMOG intervention, leading to a Lomé Peace Deal². Finally, in 2001, the war was declared over, subsequently leading to the second democratic election in 2002. The 2002 election was less contesting. The whole country had reached a national understanding, to appreciate Late President Tejan Kabba for his relentless effort restoring peace in the country. Therefore, not many new political parties resurrected. That led to the natural death of the DCP in Kono. The Kono leaders chose to unquestionably support the SLPP, as Kono stood to benefit a lot from the peace, being the most devastated district in the country.

MAKING OF A SWING DISTRICT: The Second Phase

Later President Tejan Kabba's rule ended in 2007, and there was announcement for a general election – the third democratic election ever held – post war. That time, in as much President Tejan Kabba was fully appreciated, the APC, which emerged as the most effective opposition party, after it had attained the minority status in parliament, led by now President Ernest Bai Koroma, started galvanizing ways to take power from the SLPP. Vote was needed to win the election, but what was needed most was MONEY. The APC needed a strong financier. Then, the hunt for a strong financier was launched. Diana Konomanyi, the now Minister of Lands, Housing and Country Planning had her brother in the State who had reportedly borrowed investor's money to establish a mining company and convinced him to 'buy' the Vice Presidency of the APC. Not knowing how much was discussed behind closed doors, the APC then unveiled their new funder – Mr. Samuel Sam-Sumana. The election was held, with PMDC backing APC in the runoff to make a new government – the All People's Congress Government led by President Ernest Bai Koroma. The government ruled to 2012, marking the hold of another elections, but by that time VP Sam-Sumana and his boss, the President, were not on any good terms. It was revealed later that the APC couldn't have reinstated Sam's Vice Presidency but were only forced after they noticed that without Sam-Sumana, they could lose the election (in 2012). Sam was reinstated after some tough reluctance reportedly by President Koroma.

² See <http://www.parliament.gov.sl/Portals/0/2014%20DOCUMENT/OTHER%20RESOURCES/1-The%20Lome%20Peace%20Agreement%201999.pdf>

THE FALLOUT BETWEEN SAM-SUMANA AND THE APC

After the APC won the 2012 election, it was clear across the country that the Vice President and his boss were no longer working together. Many a time, if the president was to leave the country, he would handover to the Speaker of the House, an indication that the Vice President was also out of the country. The culmination of this situation saw the removal of the VP in 2015 during the peak of the Ebola crisis.

The APC party expunged Vice President Sam-Sumana from their party and was subsequently sacked by the President three days after his (Sam-Sumana) expulsion from the party. Mr. Sam-Sumana took his case to the Supreme Court of Sierra Leone where it was ruled by all the five judges that the president has such powers to dismiss his deputy. Sam Sumana's lawyers had put forward a case that, in as much then president was elected together with his deputy, they presumed it was unconstitutional for the president to have dismissed him without going through the due course³. But Mr. Sam-Sumana didn't stop there, he took his case to the West African regional court – the ECOWAS Court. The matter was thought to have been unnecessarily delayed and prolonged, however, it was ruled that Mr. Sam-Suman's human right was abused, and that he was wrongfully sacked. The court ordered for Sierra Leone's Government to pay back all his lost emoluments and other necessary compensation⁴. The Government has yet to show any commitment towards respecting the ECOWAS courts' ruling⁵.

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³ See the Supreme Court of Sierra Leone ruling on the matter: <https://goo.gl/QgxghT>

⁴ ECOWAS ruling on Sam-Sumana case: <https://goo.gl/rtWiS4>

⁵ See the official government reaction: <https://goo.gl/7tWA51>

KONO IN 2018 ELECTION – The Birth Place of the Coalition for Change (C4C)

It is rumoured that, one of the factors that led to the sacking of Sam-Sumana was his ambition to lead the party during the 2018 election while the President was eyeing a 3rd terms (contrary to the constitution). Thus, when the court system delayed the case, his supporters, especially his tribesmen in his home district, Kono, were worried about his inability to be part of the 2018 election.

In the meantime, the main opposition, SLPP had their share of internal disagreements, especially between the incumbent flag-bearer – Retired Brigadier Julius Maada Bio and the Former UN under-secretary general, Dr Kandeh Koleh Yumkella (KKY). At the same time, it was insinuated within some quarters that Sam-Sumana would be recalled to lead the APC. On the other hand, KKY was pushing to lead the main opposition SLPP party. But as it finally came clear that both Sam-Sumana and KKY were only beating dead horses. Both settled to form individual political parties with many pundits thinking a merger between KKY and Sam-Suman could be a formidable one to unseat one of the main political parties. Insider information suggest neither Sam-Sumana nor KKY was willing to be a vice presidential candidate to the other. That brought about the KKY's National Grand Coalition (NGC) and the Sam-Sumana's Coalition for Change (C4C) political parties.

THE FIRST ROUNDS OF 2018 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Sixteen political parties participated in the first round of the March 7th 2018 elections with the SLPP leading with a small margin of 0.6% ahead of the ruling APC; NGC came third with 6.9% and the C4C a distant 4th at 3.6%.

The NGC and C4C are now the kingmakers in the second round; with the NGC showing strength in Kambia; with an elite and diaspora following. The C4Cs' stronghold is in the home district of the founder, Kono.

While the NGC and C4C had high hopes, it was evident they could not take a lead in the polls against the APC and SLPP. Given that, the politics in Sierra Leone is about party, personalities with regional and tribal slants, things are quite predictable since issues are not what determine votes.

Therefore, it was clear that majority of the Mendes would vote for the SLPP and the Temenes and other northern tribes vote for the APC. With these cleavages, it came as expected the, the results in the last election. None of the political parties was able to reach a first-run 55% threshold prescribed by the constitution; the results thus, leading to a run off is shown below:

PARTY	VOTES	%
APC	1,082,748	42.7
ADP	26,704	1.1
CDP	11,493	0.5
C4C	87,720	3.5
NDA	8,344	0.3
NGC	174,014	6.9
NPP	4,239	0.2
NURP	2,318	0.1
PLP	4,233	0.2
PMDC	9,864	0.4
RENIP	2,555	0.1
RUFP	12,827	0.5
SLPP	1,097,482	43.3
UDM	5,695	0.2
UNPP	3,061	0.1
UP	3,825	0.2
	2,537,122	100.3

WHAT NOW FOR THE C4C AND THE NGC? Our Forecast

As the political gimmicks gets entrenched, it is becoming very difficult to predict the next government. With the main opposition leader, the incumbent and NGC and C4C pulling significant votes, all vote hunters from the two runoff contenders are now soliciting endorsement from the two significant political parties – the NGC and the C4C.

But as it stands, one is obliged to settle on few ideas before forecasting the next political move.

First is their basis of formation. Unlike the NGC, the C4C was formed out of a clear tribal revolt – a demonstration that the Konos are relevant, that they are the determinant in deciding every new government, and once they were badly treated by the APC, they could stand on their own, not necessarily to win the presidency, but to exert their importance and force, for profitable negotiation. This has happened – the C4C won 8 out of the 9 parliamentary seats in Kono (petitioning a ninth seat).

The NGC on the other had the sky as its limit. The formation sprang out of hope to clinch State House from, especially the main opposition who were confident that this is their time to rule. The NGC ensured that its membership was evenly distributed across the length and breadth of the country, but as already mentioned, the leaders tribe – the Susu is one of the minority tribes

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and since votes are still largely cast along regional and tribal lines, he only managed to win 4 seats so far in one district (out of 16) – Kambia.

The prediction now is that, based on the deteriorated state of affairs between former Vice President Sam-Sumana and his former APC party, it is very unlikely that he would go back to a party that has disgraced him and even allegedly attempted to take his life. From alleged gun smuggling smear campaign to attempted assassination under the ruling APC Sam-Sumana is expected to stand with the SLPP, even though he calls them “another evil”.

Sam Sumana fears an APC win will erode all the work he has done; he is also reported to be under pressure from his supporters in Kono to declare for the SLPP than the APC. The former mayor, who was consider as Sam-Sumana’s key ally was unseated immediately Sam was removed from office – using same executive powers.

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However, there other speculations that Sam-Sumana is showing some reluctance to tow line with SLPP. Commentators say he fears that will kill his baby party. This is an unpopular stance though, which has made it very clear that he will lose pace among the heart of the Kono people should he show any indication that he fears APC and would rather stay neutral instead. In the people’s views, staying neutral is tantamount to supporting APC. This is not what majority of Sam-Sumana’s supporters want. What the supporters of the C4C want is to punish APC, and the only way to doing so is by openly supporting SLPP.

The NGC, unlike the C4C is also unique and difficult. It is predicted that the NGC leader will not declare for his former party the SLPP regardless his call for change. First, he fiercely fought Mr. Bio for the position – that was a show that he did not believed in the leadership of Bio. He had

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already opposed him (Bio) while projecting himself. The second reason can be, KKY didn't just leave the SLPP, he was harassed, his mother utterly molested and personally debarred from accessing the party's office. He was therefore very aggrieved when he left. Regardless, the fact remains was from SLPP; his father was a founding member, the personal maltreatment meted on him could permanent deter him from re-joining the SLPP in this particular dispensation. He also has to prove to the world that his arch-rival, Maada Bio, is not electable. In another view, there is also fear that KKY would want to protect his families and tribesmen in the north. Tribalism and regionalism have not been removed from Sierra Leone's geopolitics. KKY is from the north and so in the eyes of the SLPP and ACP ally than the SLPPs'. The SLPP feels late former President Kabba sold out the party when he handed power to President Koroma.

It is evident KKY believes he has a chance to win the next election, hence supporting the APC would be a shot in his own foot. Also, he was the personal target of the APC's dual citizenship campaign, the expunging of his name as part of the people that contributed to the Bankasoka Mini Hydro project.

We expect the NGC to not declare support for any of the two contending runoff parties.

For the other political parties – the ADP will likely follow the KKY trend because they are both in the same category. CDP has already declared for the SLPP.

For the APC party, we expect a mix of the following tactics: “divide and conquer”, buy-off key opposition figures with juicy positions and offers. That said, the fluidity of the situation makes it all hard to predict until the exit polls begin to come in.

About the Contributor



Berns Komba Lebbie is a Project Officer for the [Network Movement for Justice and Development](#) (NMJD) in the Kono district as the Citizens Rights and Responsibilities in Governance Project. A former teacher, Berns seeks “to make significant change in the political affairs of his community”.

NMJD engages government on policy/legislative reforms and has a long history and experience in facilitation participatory development processes with local communities in Sierra Leone. The organization enjoys tremendous respect and legitimacy among both local and international partners including national CSOs, the media, government and the donor community. NMJD focuses on empowering people, as well as strengthening their capacity, to build a free, just and democratic Sierra Leone where there is respect for human rights and sustainable development for the benefit of all.

Editorial Note:

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About Think Africa Institute

Think Africa Institute [TAI] is a consulting firm and think tank incorporated in the Netherlands in September 2017.

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3. **To grow, we must shed Knowledge**: We believe knowledge can be “Shed” – that old and unusable knowledge is left behind after our service.

Management

Simon Tsike-Sossah, Think Africa Institute’s Founder and Managing Director. He has more than 15 years of experience working in international development sector and is a certified “Civilian Peace Consultant” from the Academy for Conflict Transformation in Bonn, Germany. He has facilitated trainings for countless iNGOs, civil society organizations and government aid agencies such as UNEP, Oxfam, Action Aid, IRN Sierra Leone. And has consulted for the Open Society Initiative, West Africa Civil Society Institute, ECOWAS and the West African Civil Society Forum among others.

Annemieke Tsike-Sossah is board member of Think Africa Institute’s parent holding, **Sweet Jollof Group** and supports the organization on administrative and legal tasks. Her background is in international law and after gaining work and life experience through jobs in South Africa and Ghana; she’s been increasing her knowledge on financial, developmental and humanitarian issues since starting with a Dutch-based philanthropy that’s linked to a large brand.

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