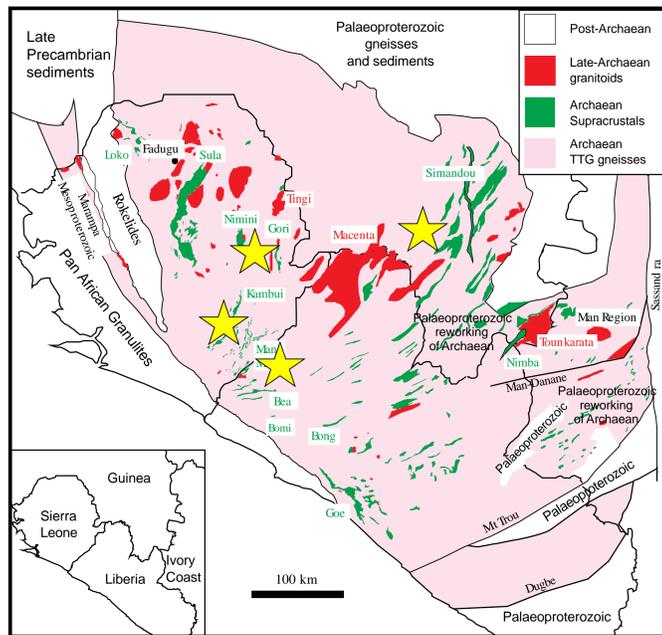


# Ethical Challenges for Mineral Resource Extraction in Sierra Leone

Hugh Rollinson – [hr410@cam.ac.uk](mailto:hr410@cam.ac.uk); [h.rollinson@derby.ac.uk](mailto:h.rollinson@derby.ac.uk)



## Diamonds in Sierra Leone



Diamond occurrences in Sierra Leone and neighbouring countries (shown as yellow stars on the adjacent geological map) are found in both the host-rock kimberlite and in alluvial river gravels.

Diamonds have been mined in Sierra Leone since the 1930's. In 2016 it was Africa's seventh largest diamond producer and diamond exports made the largest contribution to the GDP



During this time there have been some remarkable 'finds' including the 620 carat Sefadu Diamond and the 969 carat (uncut) Star of Sierra Leone from which a large number of flawless stones have been cut to make a single brooch.



## Sierra Leone – economic background

Sierra Leone is one of the world's poorest countries and has been so for over 40 years. It is currently ranked by the IMF as the tenth poorest country with a per capita GDP of \$505. In recent years it has been ravaged by civil war (1991-2002) and paralysed by the Ebola virus. Yet it is a country rich in mineral resources – in particular diamonds, thus an economy highly dependent upon geoscientific knowledge.



At The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge we are engaged in research into the relationship between Science, Faith and Human flourishing. However, in Sierra Leone the application of geoscientific knowledge is not leading to human flourishing. In fact the reverse is true. Maconachie, writing in 2012, states that 'today, some of the worst poverty in Sierra Leone is concentrated in diamond mining towns'. I maintain that in this particular context the application of geoscience prevents human flourishing, a topic discussed elsewhere as the 'resource curse'. It is suggested that an appropriate solution can be found in the concept of a 'preferential option for the poor' rooted in a Christian understanding of God's priority for the poor.



## Artisanal diamond mining



Much of the diamond mining in Sierra Leone is alluvial and the deposits, distributed over several thousand km<sup>2</sup>, are impossible to police.

This has led to:

- widespread illegal artisanal mining
- extreme social exploitation through patronage, so that artisanal mineral extraction has become a form of modern-day slavery
- diamond smuggling so that only 10-15% of their true value returns to the country
- diamonds as a 'lootable' commodity give rise to a greed-based economy
- the funding and prolonging of a civil war.



Further

- legally exported diamonds yield a very low return to the local economy (3%) and 6% to central government
- there is a lack of economic transparency; diamonds form 'an industry shrouded in secrecy with multimillion dollar deals done with a handshake'.



## Models of sustainable development

At an international level the fact that mining was not included in the UN 1992 Agenda 21, the Agenda for Sustainable Development means that the minerals industry globally is controlled almost entirely by the 'free play of a market that is interested primarily in profits'. Recent models of sustainable development challenge the prevailing view and now see *people* as a part of the total ecosystem, so that in the case of mining, success is measured in terms of its long term contribution to both human flourishing and ecosystem well-being. This is in contrast to the short-term and commercial pressures that prioritise mine over community. Thus in this newer model for Sustainable Development *success will come about through respectful and authentic relationships at a local level between a mine and its community.*

At a governmental level Sierra Leone is seeking to adopt the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative requiring greater corporate and social responsibility on the part of mining companies. This initiative, which has received a renewed emphasis under President Bio, is designed to ensure that the 'natural resource wealth becomes an engine for sustainable economic growth and poverty eradication in Sierra Leone'. However, it is unclear whether a governmental initiative can generate suitable authentic relationships at a local level. It is suggested here, that locally based faith communities, where natural networks already exist, can play a better role in generating long-term authentic relationships between mine and community to foster human flourishing. There is already a precedent for this as faith communities were important in helping curb the Ebola outbreak in 2014-16. The issues identified here are, of course not unique to West Africa, for there are other resource rich-countries, several of which are also in Africa, where these principles also apply.



Hugh Rollinson is Course Director at the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge. He is also Emeritus Professor of Earth Sciences at the University of Derby. His academic interests are in Archaean crustal evolution, an interest that has grown since he was employed as a mapping geologist by the Government of Sierra Leone in the 1970's. He has published a number of papers on the geology and geochemistry of Sierra Leone, the most recent of which was in 2018.