

Sierra Leone Police Reform: the role of the UK government

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Prepared for the GRIPS State-Building Workshop 2010: Organizing Police Forces in Post-Conflict Peace-Support Operations, January 27-28th, 2010

ABSTRACT

Sierra Leone's civil war left development urgently needing security and security urgently needing reform. The initial UK response was un-coordinated until the Poverty Reduction Strategy 2004 which highlighted the importance of security. The SSR review, in response, made the security-development link explicit and all state security providers together with the judiciary, oversight mechanisms and relevant NGOs were brought together under the Justice Sector Development Programme. This review of police reform, questions its understanding of the political context; the wisdom of ignoring chiefs and commercial security; and the poorly conceived community policing programme. Overall the UK's most important police reform programme proved too ambitious.

This work was supported in part by Global COE Program "The Transferability of East Asian Development Strategies and State Building", Mext, Japan.

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References

Introduction.

In the mid 1990s the UK government was faced with a West African member of the Commonwealth, Sierra Leone, in crisis. It had been immersed in a civil war since 1991 that had left 50,000 dead and one million displaced; the state had almost ceased to exist outside the capital; the elected president was in exile; rebels held sway over much of the country; and the army and police were in disarray and offered little security to most of the population. During 1996, in what turned out to be just a lapse in conflict, the UK began to respond to the Sierra Leone Government's call for help that included reform of its security services. The process, however, had hardly begun when the rebels re-emerged in a further assault on the capital of Freetown. It was not until the end of 1999 that the security reform process began again largely under the direction of the UK's DfID, the department for international development.

No one doubted the need for reform. The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission described the police before the war as 'incompetent', 'corrupt', 'a ready tool for the perpetuation of state terror against political opponents', and as engaged in 'extortion of money' and 'the violation of basic human rights' (2004, Vol.3a: 77). Following the war the security forces were not just decimated and their buildings, equipment and files destroyed; they had the additional problem of bearing a history of corruption, incompetence, predation and violence against their own people. And an estimated 40 per cent were illiterate. They were in a sorry state. During the ten-year war approximately 900 police officers had been killed by the rebels, and a considerable number suffered amputation. Their size had been reduced from 9,317 to 6,600. It was clear, however, that there would be little development in the country without security; and that security would not materialise without transformation of the security forces; and that the reform had to happen quickly as West African ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group) peacekeeping forces were shortly to withdraw from Sierra Leone. In the event there was little time for new strategies for reforming the police and the army. What was needed, in the UK government's eyes, was urgent repair of state systems before there was a relapse into further violence. Hence a series of programmes was rolled out with little thought about co-ordination.

In spite of the haste to begin change, a series of decisions and insights occurred that were later to coalesce (almost accidentally) into a coherent security sector reform. First, the security reform came under the overall development programme for Sierra Leone. For the first time in UK thinking the argument found acceptance in government circles that contributing to security infrastructure was an essential part of providing for the welfare of the people. Second, security no longer seemed to be an area of unique requirements when it was seen that, in essence, much of what was required in security institutions was straightforward public management reform. Third, there was, even at the beginning of the reforms, doubts about whether security was synonymous with the military. Did it not include intelligence; and did it not include the police? In the minds of some, security as a concept seemed to imply multi-agency approaches, although the military were not inclined to embrace that conclusion at that time. Fourth, security reform emerged as a priority in post-conflict

reconstruction. As the state security forces had been part of the cause of the conflict and the failure to bring it to an end, so their reform was a matter of urgency to bring security back to the country.

As the breadth of the security needs began to take focus, so the UK could not be unaware that security reform was on everybody's agenda in Sierra Leone: the people wanted a reformed army and police that offered protection rather than threat; uniformed forces that met *their* needs. Likewise the Sierra Leone government wanted an army and police force that didn't threaten their very existence, but organisations that were dependable, apolitical and whose professionalism would enhance their legitimacy. And so in these early reflections on Sierra Leone's needs from both the popular and the government perspective, the UK had its first glimpse of the potential of treating security in a sectoral approach, although it didn't then have a sufficiently clear conceptualisation of it to consider integrating its police, legal and military programmes which remained separate entities.

1. The police reform process

With the renewed rebel attack of 1999 repelled (though rebel attacks continued in parts of the country until 2001), the UK began again with its police reform under the Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project (CCSSP) (alongside, initially, an UNPOL programme). Its unquestioned premise was that the state must create a police force that can provide visible and reliable internal security for the people. Given the existing poverty of both resources and reputation, this in the first place was a capacity building exercise. To get the police beyond Freetown and at least into the main towns required uniforms, vehicles and communications and the use of the armed wing of the police in the volatile situation of large numbers of still armed ex-combatants. To tackle the management reform an Inspector-General of Police (IGP) was brought in from the UK who transformed the senior management team through training and by promotions according to merit rather than seniority. Both re-equipment and management restructuring were inevitably slow processes and not until 2002 did the SLP really gain a significant presence in the regional centres outside Freetown.

By 2004 police barracks had been built and more than 700 vehicles had been provided to the police. Yet at 6,000 officers (2,400 of whom were part of the armed wing, the Operational Support Division – OSD) the SLP was still too small to handle a situation where: there were still hostile armed groups present in the countryside; there were combatants yet to be disarmed and reintegrated; and in addition there were rising levels of reported crime and potential political public disorder. Reflecting on that period the current IGP (who took office in 2003) said: 'At this point the SLP simply did not have the power to establish a monopoly on delivering security to the population' (quoted in Albrecht and Jackson, 2009: 88). For the Sierra Leonean government (and British advisers) to ask them to deliver a monopoly on internal security was clearly not realistic; but none could or would imagine alternatives to the state provision on the Western model. Of course the training of new recruits was going on at the rate of 1,000 a year to raise personnel levels to 9,500, but few then

(or now) were prepared to ask questions about sustainability – how was the government going to pay for salaries, let alone for the maintenance and replacement (at 100 vehicles per year alone) of their equipment? To seek security monopoly for a force that is unsustainable from its inception might be thought a strange strategic decision.

Part of the answer to limited personnel was the community policing approach, known in Sierra Leone as Local Needs Policing. This had been part of the vision of Sierra Leone security officials for reforming the police since 1998. From 2002 concerned citizens in each police division, especially in Freetown were brought into anti-crime partnerships with the police known as Local Policing Partnership Boards. As with most such schemes, the talk was of involving local communities in the security of their neighbourhoods, of working with the police to determine security issues and their solutions, of citizen participation, police accountability and enhancing the police image as a body concerned for citizens welfare as a ‘force for good’. They did not, however, warrant a budget and relied very heavily on the enthusiasm of volunteer local activists, with all the ensuing problems that entails. In truth they have proved rather more popular at higher management levels than local commander level, at least as regards activity.

At the strategic level matters began to take a significant turn and the broader view of security and of its links with development began to take hold. The catalyst was largely the Poverty Reduction Strategy paper (PRSP) 2004. Faced with the imminent withdrawal of United Nations troops and the publication of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s report that once again highlighted the failures of the security forces in the cause and prosecution of the civil war, the PRSP advanced the importance of security to development. Indeed, it made security one of its three central pillars. Its message was that governance, peace and security belonged together. And the Security Sector Review that was published in its wake in 2005, engaged with the issue of what security arrangements were necessary to provide that security that was the necessary foundation for development.

This was probably the first time the nexus had been made so explicit in development circles. Yet as in virtually all other conceptualisations of the security sector since, the emphasis was almost totally on state providers of security - as if they had ever or would ever be the majority security provider in a developing country! It is true that the Sierra Leone Security Review did mention private security companies, but they have rarely been considered or involved since in the process of shaping a national security strategy. And as for the customary chiefs who provided the majority of the security and justice for the rural areas where half the population still lived, there was silence, as if they did not exist. But as far as the state element of the security sector was concerned, the innovation was gathering together security providers such as the Police, Military, Prison Service and Customs and Immigration; along with the Judiciary; the Office of National Security and the Central Intelligence and Security Unit; and including the Ministries of Interior, Justice, and Defence. In addition, there was the acknowledgment of the role of other actors such as the oversight

mechanisms (e.g. parliamentary committees for defence and human rights); and even the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Civil Society and NGOs. The step had at last been taken in the formulation of the PRSP and the Security Review that accompanied it, that ensured that security policy should be seen as an integrated affair between all agencies with a stake in the process. No longer would the police be seen as a separate entity; any more than would the army or the courts or the prisons. Their work impacted on one another and reform, it was now argued, had to be simultaneous across the sector if it was to be effective. Only a glance at the SLP was sufficient to demonstrate the fact. Here was a reforming organisation that found it very discouraging that their increasing effectiveness in arresting and charging alleged criminals had not been met by a corresponding increase in the capacity of the courts and prisons. It may well be, as Albrecht and Jackson argue that: ‘The process of integrating security into a broader development process, namely the PRSP, is one of the lasting legacies of the Sierra Leone experience of security system transformation’ (2009: 124).

Though the strategy became clear the implementation has not been straightforward. Since 2005 the Sierra Leone government, together with the UK as the leading donor in security matters, has had the opportunity to implement this broader and integrated approach. Unfortunately it has not been very successful at promoting co-ordination between agencies and Ministries concerned with security, whether for want of skills or lack of interest given the initial improvements or simply the result of long traditional patterns of working in isolation. For their part, the UK government has tried to offer programmes that cut across the sector. Thus the Justice Sector Development Programme (JSDP) (that replaced the CCSSP) aspires not so much to sustain the police operationally, but to support them by sustaining the inter-locking system of which they are part. As part of its goal to improve safety and security especially for the poor, assistance has been offered the police in improving police-community relations in two areas. First there has been support for the Partnership Boards. Second there has been the construction and equipment of facilities at several Freetown police stations to house the Family Support Unit (FSU) a unit that has proved popular since its inception in 2000 in dealing in some measure with domestic violence and other sexual violence against women and children. The JSDP has also assisted the SLP in the areas of the change management; improving custody and detention procedures; reviewing police training; seeking to strengthen the role of the Complaints, Discipline and Internal Investigation Unit (CDIIU), and reviewing the criminal investigation department.

By 2005 the police had reached their designated ceiling of 9,500, although the number itself was never justified in terms of a need assessment and clearly was more related to what the British deemed was affordable. It was still a very urban force and indeed a very Freetown-orientated force. It was also one still short of uniforms, equipment and especially accommodation. The new emphasis on support for the security and justice sector as a whole has inevitably meant less resources for operational requirements. Aware that this was the downside of an integrated approach, a new project was devised by the UK’s military and defence-orientated

Sierra Leone SSR Programme (SILSEP) which focused on strengthening the SLP's operational ability; particularly its ability to gather and analyse criminal and security intelligence, and enhancing its capacity in operational planning, event management and public disorder. Other SILSEP police projects have included media training, community liaison and asset management. As Albrecht and Jackson note, the emergence of two programmes for the police amounted to a division between justice issues (handled by the JSDP programme) and security issues, in this case police operational capacity (handled by the SILSEP programme), in apparent contradiction to the call for integration. Having two separate programmes funding activity within a single organisation is inevitably both difficult to co-ordinate and almost impossible to manage coherently.

2. Evaluating police reform

Today an evaluation of the police suggests many positive gains since the transformation was begun ten years ago. First, operational capability has been built in terms of numbers of trained personnel, and available buildings and vehicles and communications. Second the management structure has been overhauled to reflect merit, streamlined to maximize efficiency and trained to impart key management skills. Third, SLP commanders are now routinely conducting post-operational reviews, examining where mistakes have been made and looking to learn lessons for the future. Fourth, public order training at all rank levels has provided the SLP with urgently needed planning and event management capacity. Emphasis has been placed on passing skills to front-line patrol officers as opposed to specialist officers so that disorder can be confronted in proportionate manner without early reliance on the more heavily armed specialist units. Fifth, the OSD has achieved an effective role as a mobile reserve to be deployed in support of divisional units. Sixth, it was widely acknowledged in Sierra Leone and abroad

that the successful elections of 2007 when the opposition party won, were a testament to the efficiency of the police, who deployed well-trained forces, anticipated potential outbreaks and used nonlethal crowd control methods.

As regards the perception of the SLP by the public the message is mixed. There is evidence that the police are more trusted now than they were before by the public. Before 2004 the SLP were still regarded with suspicion and fear. Yet now, whatever the criticisms concerning their slowness to respond, and bribe seeking particularly by the traffic police, the almost universal response is that the SLP are now approachable and show respect to citizens. In 2004 the SLP commissioned a public perception survey in four main urban areas (Freetown, Makeni, Bo, Kenema). Only 15 per cent felt that there had been 'no improvement' in SLP behaviour, whilst 46 per cent thought there had been 'a great improvement in police attitude', particularly as regards human rights and 'rudeness'. Nevertheless the last years of the Kabbah administration were regarded by many as ones of bureaucratic embezzlement of development funds, conflicts of interest in the awarding of government contracts and connivance of the police and courts in allowing the offenders of these offences to escape justice. And an ICG report, reported that focus group they carried out among grassroots, youth-orientated organisations in the Freetown area early 2008 found that: 'Their primary

concern on corruption was that the police and courts should be less amenable to bribery and so give them greater protection from debt defaulters, criminal gangs and sellers of pirated music recordings' (ICG, 2008: 21). Such reports of bribery will disappoint UK police advisers who have been seeking to raise the SLP to international standards of democratic policing. Yet others suggest, in a somewhat defeatist fashion, that all this is normal by West Africa standards and much better than the pre-war and war years. Still others might take the line that bringing change to notoriously conservative institutions especially those in poor countries particularly susceptible to corruption is not a task that can be fulfilled in just one decade.

It seems to me, however, that the assessment of ten years reform is not to be measured at the level of outputs such as police station facilities, numbers of vehicles, workshops attended, management restructuring, numbers trained in crowd control. The focus has to be outcomes for the 6 million Sierra Leoneans, whether they live in Freetown or in the provinces. To what extent do people feel they are protected from crime by the police or to what extent do they turn to the police when crime occurs. Are the police accessible even, let alone responsive, respectful, upright and effective. From my own work in Sierra Leone back in 2005 and 2006, and from what I have read since, I confess to being disappointed with the limited transformation regarding outcomes and I want to suggest some reasons why this might be so. I want to suggest that the UK-led police reform has been based on some assumptions and has made (or not made) some strategic decisions that are at least worth revisiting. I list below five areas of assumptions and strategy that I would seriously question.

3. Did the reform understand the political context?

First, I question the assumption that the state in Sierra Leone, as other developing countries, is basically a poor/weak/fragile/failed version of Western states. To me this is a grave mistake that leads to flawed development programmes. Personally I find persuasive the thesis that states in developing countries are best understood as very different polities from those of the West. Measured against the Western model of necessary institutions, levels of penetration of society, core functions performed, they have indeed 'failed'; but there is more to them than weak versions of our own Western systems. Rather, they are distinct polities with their own rules of governance and relationships to society. The term used by an increasing number of scholars of this persuasion is 'hybrid states' (Boege et al. 2008: 2). These are states where introduced institutions either exist as parallel forms of authority to pre-existing forms or where they have been progressively indigenised in their interactions with local social forces. The mutual interaction results in novel hybridised forms of order and governance that fuse elements drawn from both Western and indigenous political traditions. For example, historic patterns of clientelism are grafted onto modern forms of political order to create neo-patrimonialism; modern norms of gender equality and sentencing regimes permeate customary court structures; police carry out the sentencing of corporal punishment in chiefs' courts; local religious and moral values direct police arrests of adulterers and witchcraft practitioners, despite the absence of any relevant statutory law; and so forth. The typical post-colonial state in Africa is one whose structure says Chabal, is composed of 'overlapping layers of formal and

informal spheres of power' (Chabal 2006: 1) or is one where Western processes and institutions 'easily co-exist with social and political relations and practices which may continue much as before' (Roberts 2008: 71). A distinct feature of these hybrid states is that non-state authorities play a major role for the distribution of public goods, such as policing. It is a polity where familiar Western distinctions between public and private, state and nonstate, modern and customary frequently blur and where historical 'indigenous mechanisms of socio-legal and political organization' have been retained as more appropriate than those offered by donors (Roberts 2008: 79).

In this hybrid polity, so common in post-colonial states, it is not just the institutions that are different.

People do not perceive themselves as citizens or nationals (at least not in the first place). They define themselves instead as members of particular sub- or trans-national social entities (kin group, tribe, village). This is particularly true where state agencies are not present on the ground and the state does not deliver any services with regard to education, health, infrastructure or security. Rather, it is the community that provides the nexus of order, security and basic social services. People have confidence in their community and its leaders, but they have no trust in the government and state performance. 'The state' is perceived as an alien external force, far away not only physically (in the capital city), but also psychologically. Individuals are loyal to 'their' group (whatever that may be), not the state. As members of traditional communities, people are tied into a network of social relations and a web of mutual obligations, and these obligations are much more powerful than obligations as a 'citizen'. People do not obey the rules of the state, but the rules of their group. Legitimacy rests with the leaders of that group, not with the state authorities – or only with state authorities insofar as they are at the same time leaders in a traditional societal context (Boege et al. 2008: 10).

My concern is the degree to which the security reform policy as devised for the Sierra Leone police and other security providers, took into account that in Sierra Leone, as would be expected of a hybrid polity, there existed many orders at the sub-state level, each being enforced by their own policing. Knowing the social and political context in which one is operating is basic and here, not untypically, was a state that did not have a privileged position as the political framework that provides security. It was one which had to share authority, legitimacy and capacity with other structures. To mistake Sierra Leone for no more than a failed attempt to be a Western state seems to me to be a fundamental error and one that leads to mistaken and unachievable policy objectives.

4. Was the goal of statebuilding the right one for the reform?

Second, I question the state building strategy that underlies the entire security reform including policing reform. I see this as an error resulting from the misunderstanding of the nature of the state in Sierra Leone. Unaware that they faced a hybrid state and not a failed Western state, the ultimate goal has been to construct that Western model. I believe their goal is unrealisable and inappropriate. It is to mistake the means (reform of the state police) for the end (personal security). They have turned their backs on those who were (and are) *already* providing policing in Sierra Leone e.g. the customary, community-based, commercial or informal providers. On normative grounds they have had little time for traditional and locally based authorities, even

though these ‘may be key channels for public service delivery as well as critical actors in re-establishing post-war stability and social reconciliation’ (Call and Cousens 2007: 9). They have attempted, with very few resources, to create a state force virtually from scratch that is intended to hold a monopoly of providing policing for citizens across the country. Their model has been based on two false assumptions, namely: that the African state is able (or even willing) to deliver policing to a majority of its population; and that it is even the principal actor in policing provision.

The mistake was not the policing advisers of the UK government alone. The near universal solution offered to the problems of developing states is the state-building agenda, which focuses on strengthening state institutions, particularly security institutions. State-building is about enhancing the capacities of state actors for control, regulation and implementation, particularly in the core fields of statehood, namely internal security, basic social services, the rule of law and legitimacy of government. State building, says the OECD, ‘is the central objective of international engagement in fragile states’ (OECD 2008: 7). Likewise, Lakhdar Brahimi, former special adviser to the UN Secretary General, asserts: ‘statebuilding is unapologetically seen as the central objective of any peace operation’ and ‘all international protagonists’ should ‘serve that objective’ (Brahimi 2007: 4). The intensity of their argument is due to the belief that state-building is the way to legitimate the state. And given that they see justice, security, and policing as foundational state activities, they cannot conceive a legitimate state other than one that is performing these functions. Thus DfID speaks of, ‘the centrality of states within development’ (DfID 2008: 3) and of the donor’s role as being to ‘enhance their ability to function’ (DfID 2008: 4). Similarly, the OECD says that the overall aim must be to support the building of ‘effective and legitimate states able to fulfil key international responsibilities and to provide core public goods and services, including security’ (OECD 2008: 3). That such an ambitious goal as to build a form of statehood that hardly exists in reality beyond the OECD world was undertaken (and still is) apparently without question, seems hard to believe.

I am not surprised that the almost universal conclusion of studies on post-conflict state building in the security and justice sector is that little has been achieved. Call and Cousens admit that efforts to build security institutions have not been ‘especially encouraging’ (2007: 8-9). Englebort and Tull argue that the results of UN peace operations in Africa, ‘have been paltry, particularly as regards the establishment of self-sustaining state institutions’ (2008: 106). Despite large investment of resources, the World Bank admits that: ‘the numerous rule of law assistance programs in post-conflict or fragile countries have so far resulted in few lasting consequences’ (Samuels 2006: 15).

The irony is that much of this political project has been an attempt to enhance state legitimacy and thus stability. Instead, however, it could be argued that the project has actually undermined state legitimacy by ignoring the very actors that did have authority and were regarded as the people’s main sources of security provision. The state is legitimate when it is grounded in its cultural heritage, yet Western policies of statebuilding can undermine that foundation of legitimacy. The State-building

programs and the security and justice sector reform within them, have, rarely take into account the main players in the sector namely, local or non-state policing structures. ‘The tendency of reconstruction programs to dismiss the contributions of indigenous institutions - such as self-help associations, churches, NGOs, and other grassroots organizations - alienates citizens from the rebuilding of their states and undermines democratic accountability’ (François and Sud 2006: 128).

Had the programme designers begun, not with the concept of a ‘fragile’ post-conflict state, but a ‘hybrid political order’, then they would have seen new options for governance – ones where security is not the sole prerogative of the state; ones that are multi-layered. They would have seen besides the police, the customary chiefs that offered policing in the countryside; the work place associations that offered security in the town markets and bus stations; the youths that helped out where they could in the slums; the commercial companies that guarded the main economic assets of the country (Baker, 2005).

5. Can the chiefs be overlooked by policing reform?

Third, I question the exclusion of the chiefs from the policing reform process. This is not to deny that there are many problems associated with them. Before the war appointments were subject to political interference by the government; and some chiefs were guilty of corruption and excessive or arbitrary fines, especially on young men, driving them to indentured labour for the chief. In addition, the failure of chiefs to stay with their people during the war and the slowness of some to return with their people to the villages certainly reduced some of the previous deference shown them (Richards, 2003; Fanthorpe, 2006; Richards, 2005).

Yet despite this, the institution of chieftaincy is still popular in Sierra Leone, perhaps because, although it shares the same negative characteristics as central government, it does at least have the advantage of being local and accessible and culturally relevant. ‘Chieftaincy remains the most important system of authority across rural Sierra Leone (Manning 2009: 19). Nevertheless it was a surprise to many in the international community when the British supported Kabbah’s post-war governance strategy of reinstalling the institution in the rural areas (Fanthorpe 2006). The argument was that the paramount chiefs and their courts were a strategic necessity to prevent disenchanted CDF rank-and-file from taking over the disruptive role of RUF rebels in the countryside. It was also hoped that chiefs returning would encourage IDPs to return home. There may well have been political motives such as expecting support for the restoration of chiefs to be reciprocated by returning the vote of their people in support of Kabbah.

Whatever the motives of the politicians for restoring the chiefs after the war, the fact is that they are in place, are largely popular as an institution despite individual exceptions, and, crucially, almost everywhere in Sierra Leone, disorder, anti-social behaviour, inter-personal disputes, crime and their resolution are regulated by them. As a recent World Bank report concluded: ‘local justice and governance’ in rural and

peri-urban Sierra Leone 'are delivered ... by a complex network of institutions' (Manning, 2009: 19) The customary courts either advise people to go to the Police and state courts in serious matters, or using customary law, handle civil and customary matters within their own local courts. The customary courts are particularly focused on cases involving family law, debt repayment, inheritance, and land tenure. In the absence of the police and courts, and their inaccessibility, their cost and their at times differing moral standards, the chiefs and their policing are all that the people of the countryside have. They are the police of the countryside and there is no likelihood that in the near future the SLP will be so strong that they will be establishing posts across the country with officers of integrity and skill and local knowledge to handle the local disputes. Yes their activities are far from ideal. They have been accused of discriminatory practices, particularly against women, youths and non-landholding lineages. Local NGOs (e.g. Campaign for Good Governance) regularly report cases of serious beatings of wives for which chiefs courts handed out sentences of small fines or even took no action at all. The local courts also frequently abuse their powers by illegally detaining persons, charging excessively high fines for minor offences, and adjudicating criminal cases. But these criticisms are no more than a case for reforming them, not for ignoring them. Here is a volunteer force in place that can be utilised without great cost in terms of facilities, equipment and salaries. Yet they are ignored and plans are made to provide the countryside with a police force that cannot be afforded.

In 2005 I spoke to a police Local Unit Commander in the countryside. He told me that for an entire police division there were available just 131 officers including 30 OSD. There were five police stations and two posts, hence much of the area was uncovered. The Commander pointed to a map and said with regret that that entire area had no police presence at all and that his hope was to redress that absence. For the time being 'Our priority is the main towns. We cannot cover all the villages. I am confident that the NA [native authority Police] can cope except in the mining youth'. A little later that day I went to the area where the police map was blank and spoke to a group of 15 villagers, mostly youths, male and female. They told me that they had no problems regarding security and that they had a local customary court 'for conflicts between men and women'. Interestingly they 'don't send cases to the Police or the paramount [for] he hid in the bush with chiefs [in war]' I raised the subject of whether they would like the police post that the regional commander dreams of providing for them. Their response: 'What do we need a post for? There is no need for a post. We are all right'.

What if a police post was provided? I went to one such isolated post in rural Kono District in 2005. Four male officers were based there with one at any time present. The only transport available was a damaged bike. To gather evidence from surrounding villages they walk. If a case concerns women, the officer calls in the local women's organisation leader. The post has no toilet and no accommodation (the acting officer sleeps on the floor of the post). The pay is 130,000 Leones per. month, i.e. the equivalent of just over two bags of rice. I ask 'Is this enough to live on?', he replies: 'It is not enough. I depend on the help of others'. Is this really the vision we

have of providing policing in the countryside? Why is the reform plan trying to roll out this sort of provision when a policing structure in the form of the chiefs is already in place and in most cases is not beyond reform into something acceptable and workable? If a state police alternative cannot be offered them, then it makes sense to work with what we have and can afford at present. And anyway, as would be expected in a hybrid polity, the chieftaincy system already engages 'constructively with new "modern" structures and ideas' in ways that show its capacity for adaption and reform (Manning 2009: 19). There can be more value in reforming chiefs' policing role than presiding over their demise.

6. Can commercial security be overlooked form the policing reform?

Fourth, I question also the marginalisation of the commercial security companies in the policing reform. Though commercial security companies were listed in the security sector of the Security Review, they have not in practice been engaged with as part of the security sector review.

Though they offer significant policing to key facilities in the economy they are for the most part left unattended. The principal work of commercial companies is to provide unarmed guards to commercial premises, international organisations, NGOs and residential customers. The Sierra Leone Office of National Security estimates that about 30 security companies currently operate in the country, but the actual number may be higher.

G4S Security Services alone had in 2009 more than 1,400 employees. Its services include guard security such as mobile patrol, VIP protection, static guards, cash transportation, airport reception, visa/landing access processing, secure transport between Freetown and Lungi Airport, mines protection, guarding of US Embassy. Other significant players are Mount Everest (1,600 employees), Pentagon (900), Hughes Security (800) (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2005: 6). Total employment in the country's private security industry may be as high as 5000, that is 50 per cent of the size of the SLP.

Many extractive mining and timber companies, such as Sierra Leone's second largest diamond exporter Koidu Holdings currently train and arm their own private security forces under agreement with the Sierra Leone government. A combination of national laws and UN rules effectively restrict private gun ownership, thus at the mine the SLP provide 23 OSD officers to work alongside Koidu's private security force, with security companies paying a premium to the individual OSD officers above the standard wages. Other companies contract the services of established private firms such as Dyncorp, MPRI or Aegis Defense Services.

Despite their effectiveness, as far as industry is concerned, security companies do raise critical problems. Most companies employ ex-soldiers or retired police with screening of recruits for criminal records by the police CID. The screening does not, however, cover rebel background, for which there has been national forgiveness. Hence some companies are unwittingly employing ex-rebels which they consider an

unsatisfactory situation. Further though training is offered the recruits by the larger companies, it is not by smaller local firms. And even the training that is provided has its limitations. Though it has to include human rights training for those who would seek contracts with the UN others normally ignore it. Indeed one operations manager of a large security firm insisted that human rights should only be considered *after* the suspect has been “made” to tell the truth! Yet another concern is over accountability, for though licences are required for commercial security companies, there is no effective inspection and no licence has been withdrawn.

These are all genuine concerns, but given the fact that private security will continue to play a serious role in policing in Sierra Leone for the foreseeable future it is all the more reason to bring them into the reform process of the security sector of which they are part.

7. Were the Partnership Boards thought through?

Fifth, I question whether the Partnership Boards introduced by the police reforms were too ambitious. In some ways they have a success. First, they have improved in part the image of the police. Second, they have been an instrument in improving mutual communication between police and communities. Third, they have been effective providers of criminal intelligence that has in turn facilitated crime investigation. Fourth, they have been a significant supplement to the overstretched resources of the police, providing intelligence, investigation, intervention, arrest and dispute resolution. Fifth, they have raised awareness of security issues among their populations (Baker 2007).

Nevertheless weaknesses are apparent; weaknesses that could well have been anticipated prior to their formation. First, at the executive level they have not involved significant numbers of youths, but are still dominated by educated and locally influential elders. Second, continuity is being lost by the high turn-over of police station commanders. Third, there is a fear among some that some of the Partnership Board executive members may be representing their family personal and political interests more than community interests. Fourth, the police-community relationship is not equal in terms of the energy and effort put into it. The activities, initiatives and even finance are coming more from the community than the police. Fifth, the Partnership Boards are uncoordinated from police HQ. This may give local freedom, but it has the disadvantage of creating an unevenness of approach and subsequent unfavourable comparisons between divisions. Finally, though community policing is represented in the police strategic plan as being of primary importance, there is no police funding to support this.

There appear then to be a number of fundamental questions that have yet to be resolved concerning community input, community representation, community awareness, community-police balance of labour, community-police commitment and mission creep. The issue of the degree of community input into programmes designated community policing has to be reviewed. Sierra Leone is not alone in having a programme where the original intentions that ‘participation’ should require the community setting the local police agenda and priorities, and advising on police promotions, has not been fulfilled.

Police resistance to such these innovations is inevitable unless it is spelled out beforehand that the new practices are non-negotiable.

Securing community forums that are truly representational is not a problem confined to policing reform. Whilst it can be said that the Partnership Boards in Sierra Leone consists of civic-minded, enthusiastic, local activists, nevertheless, as elsewhere, they are dominated by the educated and traditional elites of the community. Elections for the Partnership Boards, of course, do nothing to alter this fact; rather they but confirm an already existing local community leadership (including 'youth' leadership). It may be that true representation is impossible, but it does mean that the police need to take into account the Partnership Boards' composition (and their political ambitions) when assessing 'local opinion'.

Any process claiming to be 'community' led and supported must have genuine popular support. Of course, new institutional arrangements take time to 'bed in' and become known and accepted. Nevertheless the existence of Partnership Boards are still not known to many in their localities. Though admittedly, the police have initiated some publicity about their activities in both the print and electronic media, most of the publicity has been left to the Partnership Boards themselves. This has meant that it has been slow and patchy. The situation highlights the fact that 'community' programmes have to be actively promoted and not just established at committee level.

In almost all Partnership Boards the community form the senior partner in terms of labour, energy, enthusiasm and funding. Whilst the police appreciate the facilitating of crime investigation and the supply of crime intelligence, there is little practical contribution on their part to enabling the partnership. In some cases there are joint patrols, but in other divisions these are seen by the police as 'unhelpful'. Despite the police preoccupation with other matters, the achievements of Partnership Boards are not inconsiderable in terms of reporting, investigating crime and even resolving social disorder. The Partnership Boards might have only a minimal input into the police strategy for the local areas, but they have pursued goals that represented popular wishes, such as campaigning against school violence, achieving the removal of 'pirate ghettos', creating their own neighbourhood watch patrols, and securing extra resources for their own police divisions. All these achievements, however, have been based on the expectation of volunteer work. This has worked to a degree, but it is buoyed up by the post-war desire to rebuild the nation. This is not an infinite resource. A long-term strategy almost inevitably raises the thorny question of 'incentives', financial or otherwise, for this labour by people with little resources of their own. When there is inadequate finance even to cover items such as small refreshments at Board meetings or a quiet place to meet outside of the police station, and when most of the energy for the Partnership is being supplied by the Partnership Boards themselves, then there is surely a danger that voluntarism might run its course.

Crime reduction is related more to tackling the social and economic correlates of crime, than to community watchfulness. Aware of this, ambitious Partnership Boards have made tackling the causes of crime part of their agenda as well. Drug prevention

workshops and school clubs have been run, dispute resolution meetings have been arranged and others talk of working on the street with commercial sex workers. This broadening of the scope of Partnership Boards raises the question of mission creep. One LUC told me he wondered whether his role wasn't in danger of becoming a social worker and teacher as well as a policeman.

In the final analysis support for the Partnerships will be determined by how local people measure their contribution to reducing crime in increasing police responsiveness to local community security needs. On both fronts support looks fragile. Crime has not noticeably decreased for all the efforts of the partnership Boards. And for all the advantage of having police phone numbers to call in emergency or with crime information, the reality is, in the opinion of many, that the police are still slow to respond. There are serious problems when Board executive members are saying:

I feel shy when I tell people I'm associated with the police. Someone is suppressed – he makes a call – I know the integrity of the police, they want to do the job, but they can't – and people say, 'police no better'. I feel shy! (Interview, 8 September 2006).

Indeed the slow response had led to the formation in one division of self-styled 'neighbourhood watch groups' based on the zones. Said another executive Board member in Freetown: 'We do our own foot patrols. It began after the police were called out to a shop that was being burgled at night. By the time they came the shop was cleared out. So neighbourhood watches began' (Interview, 8 September 2006). Quickly other areas wanted them too, with the view gaining ground that Partnership Boards are about sharing information with the police but that real crime prevention was done by the Neighbourhood Watch.

A programme that intends to change police culture yet has no funding, and in practice is left by busy local commanders to junior officers without real decision-making authority, is unlikely to succeed. This has been the repeated warning regarding community policing from previous studies in Uganda and South Africa and elsewhere (Raleigh et al, 2000; Pelsler et al, 1999; Scharf, 2000; Brogden, 2004). Community policing has at its heart the development by the police of strong community ties and community service, but to be bringing such a radical culture change, whilst simultaneously reorganising the police management structure, police duties, police accountability, police professionalisation, and to be attempting this with the very few qualified in strategic management (and who were themselves almost certainly part of the old police regime), is over-ambitious. Given the difficulties of establishing viable community policing in developed countries, one has to question the appropriateness of inserting this as well into the post-conflict police reform agenda from the very beginning.

8. Conclusion

For DfID and the UK government the Sierra Leone police reform programme came to mark for them a test bed of its latest thinking on police reform policy and practice. As it evolved and grew in ambition it went far beyond seeking simply to assist the SLP to stand on its feet again. It has sought explicitly to transform the police structure, function,

values, legitimacy, service delivery outcomes, accountability, discipline and relationship with the public. This has been done as part of a wider mission of reducing poverty (through improved safety and access to justice) and preventing the likelihood of future conflict. The three police reform programmes (Commonwealth and Community Safety and Security Programme, CCSSP, 1999-2004; the Justice Sector Development Programme JSDP, 2005-10; and the Sierra Leone Security Programme, SILSEP) represent the single most important effort by the agency worldwide to fundamentally reconstruct a police service in a post-conflict state.

With hindsight one overarching mistake stands out. The reform programme was simply too ambitious. It attempted too much too quickly. Scheye, commenting on international post-conflict police says:

The objective of reform is to get ... policing up and running; no more, no less. It is not about long-term development, but short term 'getting the systems working in some form'. To try to do too much leads to failure. To be over-ambitious is not financially, politically or culturally viable and there will be no real national control or ownership (Scheye, 2004).

A system that 'works' is surely one that, for the time, being maintains locally approved order and restores it when it is disturbed. The time may come when outsiders may enter into a dialogue with that community about changes that might be made to improve the efficiency and equality and fairness and humane-ness of the provision. But in the immediate post-conflict situation it is a real bonus to have stability and normality restored, the more so when there is no alternative provision from the state on offer.

All good things come to an end and the UK's financial commitment to police reform is now winding down and the next programme will continue with the broader perspective under the name of Improved Access to Security and Justice in Sierra Leone 2010-13. Beyond that it is uncertain but support for policing by itself is seen as a decreasing priority by the UK. Its investment has been substantial and prolonged by international standards, yet as it withdraws it is not at all obvious that what it has created can be sustained by the Government of Sierra Leone by itself. The major UK experiment in police reform is over. Has it learnt from its mistakes?

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