



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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## BUILDING STRATEGIC CAPACITY IN THE POLICE: SIERRA LEONE, 1998 - 2008

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### SYNOPSIS

Sierra Leone's police service had a reputation for abuse and corruption even before the 1991-2002 civil war that slashed its numbers by a third and all but destroyed its infrastructure. Taking office in 1996, President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah set a high priority on police reform to ensure stability for postwar reconstruction and economic development. The United Kingdom, acting through the Commonwealth, was the primary benefactor, providing equipment, trainers and even an inspector general to lead the service during the first years of reform. By 2008, the Sierra Leone police featured strong and capable senior leadership, improved capacity for criminal investigations, and a positive relationship with the Sierra Leonean public. Although concerns about the sustainability of these reforms and the feasibility of additional changes remained in 2008, the development of the Sierra Leone Police during the preceding decade was an example of successful post-conflict police reform in a West African state.

*Jonathan Friedman wrote this policy note based on interviews by Arthur Boutellis in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in May 2008. Case published November 2011.*

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### INTRODUCTION

In its final report in 2004, the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an investigative committee created to chronicle human-rights abuses during the brutal civil war that officially ended two years earlier, described members of the country's police service before the fighting as "incompetent," "corrupt" and "agents of destabilization." The condition of the service and the conduct of individual police deteriorated further during the conflict, as warring parties co-opted members of the service to commit atrocities against civilians, and thousands of casualties cut

deeply into police capacity.

An estimated 50,000 people died during the fighting, which displaced more than a quarter of Sierra Leone's prewar population of four million. Nearly a third of the police service members were either killed during the war or left the service because of injuries and intolerable working conditions. State control essentially collapsed outside of Freetown, and government services were curtailed in the capital city.

In 1996, newly elected President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah took advantage of a lull in the fighting to begin making substantive changes in

the police service as part of a broad reform of the security sector. Because Sierra Leone lacked the resources to deal with the massive performance, capacity and credibility problems of the police service, Kabbah, who had worked for more than two decades for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), sought international assistance. The United Kingdom, operating through the Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project (CCSSP), played a key role in the reform efforts by providing trainers and equipment.

With the Commonwealth's support and approval, Kabbah in 1997 appointed Keith Biddle, an English career detective with significant international experience, to lead the Sierra Leone police as inspector general. Biddle had served the Commonwealth since 1994 in South Africa, advising the police on election security. He had stayed on in South Africa after the elections to assist in other police efforts.

Although renewed violence following a 1997 coup d'état derailed attempts at reform, efforts resumed in earnest a year later, when Kabbah was restored to power in a military intervention led by countries in the region. New hopes arose for the end of hostilities as a robust U.N. force prepared to replace overwhelmed peacekeepers from the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG).

Despite violence that continued through 2001, the Sierra Leone police achieved significant improvements in strategic management and basic law-enforcement capacity between 1998 and 2008. Family Support Units, an indigenous innovation that involved separate bureaus and police who were specially trained to deal with gender crimes, garnered international recognition and became a model for other countries. A shift to a community-oriented focus led to the creation of Local Policing Partnership Boards, forums in which police and local leaders discussed common needs and how to respond to them. A police complaints division helped build public respect,

and specially trained units headed off disorder and rioting, sharply reducing violence at political rallies before the 2007 presidential election.

## THE CHALLENGE

During the civil war, Sierra Leone's government effectively collapsed outside the capital city of Freetown. With rebels controlling much of the country, the security services were incapable of protecting civilians. Sierra Leone ranked last on the U.N.'s Human Development Index for several years running.

The war crippled the police service. The prewar force of 9,317 was reduced to 6,600 by 1998, as nearly 900 members were killed and others left the service because of injuries and poor working conditions. The remaining service was too small to provide security in a country the size of Sierra Leone, even in the absence of other challenges. Many remaining service members were unqualified and undertrained. An estimated 40% could not read or write, and members of the Operational Support Division, the armed section of the police, were trained in little more than how to operate their weapons. Low wages, coupled with a lack of benefits such as health care and pensions, fostered corruption among the lower ranks.

Other challenges became apparent as the fighting wound down. Thousands of unemployed former rebels posed a significant security risk, and police buildings, equipment and files were in disarray or destroyed. In 1998, the entire police service had fewer than 10 vehicles at its disposal.

In addition to logistical constraints, the Sierra Leone police had a poor reputation with the public. Because service members supplied their own uniforms, which rarely matched, their appearance alone signaled to the citizenry that this was an undisciplined and haphazard organization. Police conduct during the war—especially in 1997-98, when many members of the police were co-opted by the rebel force that briefly overthrew Kabbah—deepened the public's distrust of the

service. Lawrence Bassie, chief of staff of the Office of National Security, said, “There was some amount of moral decadence when it came to that aspect, that is just for the police. There were flagrant human rights abuses, prolonged incarceration of individuals without actually going through the proper process—that is the judicial process—high-handedness of the police such that, in fact, public perception was more or less eroded completely.”

Police reform was an urgent priority. Any effort would require significantly upgrading equipment, building police stations, hiring thousands of recruits and training them in basic police work as well as in human rights issues and specialized functions.

### FRAMING A RESPONSE

Facing severe resource constraints and a lack of public trust in the police, Kabbah sought help from the Commonwealth in 1996. Two key decisions set the course for rebuilding the service. First, Kabbah chose to maintain and reform the service rather than disband it and start over, figuring that Sierra Leone’s deep divisions required a continuous police presence even if it was imperfect. Second, in 1997, he appointed Keith Biddle as inspector general (IG) of the police, arguing that Sierra Leone needed the perspective and credibility of a political outsider in order to revive and rebuild the service. In line with Sierra Leone’s constitutional requirements, Biddle went through the parliamentary approval process even though the Commonwealth paid his wages.

Initially, Biddle was hesitant to accept the appointment, citing the risk of assuming responsibility for a police service torn by war and rejected by the public that it was meant to serve. Reflecting on the difficult decision, he said, “I was one of the people who said, ‘Don’t do it,’ because the risks were very plain. At the time we took over, we [the police] were fighting a war. The IG would have to be part of the instrument of

fighting, part of the National Security Council, or war cabinet. About a third of the police force was actually fighting, almost as infantry.”

Biddle accepted the challenge only after he received assurance from Clare Short, head of Britain’s Department for International Development (DFID), that her agency would provide long-term political and financial support. DFID became the primary benefactor during the reform period, with smaller financial contributions from the U.N. Mission in Sierra Leone and the Sierra Leone government.

Sheka Mansaray, former national security adviser, explained the thinking behind the choice of Biddle. “There was a public demand for complete restructuring of the police force—in fact, all the security forces,” Mansaray said. “The public wanted us to clean them out. One of the ways to reestablish confidence with the local constituency, with the people, was to get somebody neutral, because nobody in the system could command the kind of respect and trust that the public was looking for.”

At the urging of the Commonwealth, Biddle received greater authority than previous inspectors general because of the politicization of the police during the war. While the police still nominally functioned under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the inspector general was empowered to control the police budget and was granted broad operational independence. Mansaray said he thought Biddle might have received too much authority. “I think we went overboard in trying to really satisfy the requirements of these external donors, gave them [the police] more than just operational independence,” he said. “I think there has got to be some role for the elected authorities over the conduct of the police. How it should be done or what form it takes, I don’t know. I just feel as a matter of principle, you need to have that.”

Recognizing the need for local involvement, Biddle incorporated other senior police leaders into the decision-making process by creating an

Executive Management Board that included himself and at one time as many as 10 assistant inspectors general. The board set strategy and made key operational decisions by consensus rather than through the old hierarchical structure. The intention of the board, according to Biddle's second in command, Adrian Horn, was to make sure senior officers were aware of the major issues they faced. The board remained the chief decision-making forum even after Biddle's replacement as IG in 2004 by a Sierra Leonean, Brima Acha Kamara.

Biddle also introduced a new organizational structure aimed at coordinating security operations more closely with the military, prison workers and other security groups. In the past, lack of communication had prompted the military to get involved in police matters, especially in managing public gatherings where violence might occur. Biddle's new structure included a top-level National Security Council, set up in 1998 to discuss national security matters and to coordinate responses. The council was headed by the president and included the minister of defense, the inspector general of the police and officials of other government security organizations. An Office of National Security, whose head sat on the Security Council, was staffed by the deputy leaders in the same security organizations and was the main coordinating body for security operations. The Security Council and the national security office were replicated on regional and district levels.

## GETTING DOWN TO WORK

As government forces turned back rebel attacks in late 1999, police reform began in earnest. U.N. police advisers urged Biddle to recruit and deploy thousands of police to fill the security vacuum in areas outside Freetown and other major cities, where violence remained a problem. He recalled, "I was under pressure: 'You must recruit, you must recruit, you must recruit.'" However, Biddle decided to hold the line on the

headcount until proper training facilities were built and a new ethos had taken hold in the police service. Biddle knew this move had shortcomings, given the shaky security situation beyond the city limits of Freetown, but he judged any delay to be better than the alternative of deploying corrupt or incompetent police. "You don't do any recruitment until circumstances are right," he stressed.

Between 1999 and 2001, Biddle laid the groundwork for the resumption of recruitment. First, he directed his managers to identify and expel police service members who were considered likely to balk at the kinds of changes that had to be made. With his authority expanded beyond that of previous inspectors general, Biddle was free to take these actions. "If you recruit young people, they can be the finest people in the world," he said. "But if you throw them into an organization that has the wrong ethos, it has the wrong kind of people between them and the top, then what will happen is they become corrupted, become inefficient, become sick, lame and lazy like everybody else."

The service's poor public standing posed a challenge to the goal of recruiting Sierra Leone's best and brightest. Biddle said he launched a media campaign to sell the public on "how we wanted to work with them, how the police were going to change and work with the community." He appointed a local police spokesman, trained by a British adviser, who conducted weekly press conferences and radio interviews. The service published and disseminated a monthly journal that highlighted reform efforts. Biddle said this information campaign was successful in attracting talented and ethical applicants who previously would not have considered joining the police.

The police resumed recruitment in 2001 and hired 1,000 new cadets per year, aiming to reach a target of 9,500 set for 2008 by the Commonwealth and later increased to 12,000. That number, which approximated the size of the police service before the civil war, represented a

compromise between what was considered necessary and what was financially feasible. Initial planning involved little consideration of any target based on optimum capacity standards.

U.N. officials wanted to solve two significant problems—understaffing in the police service and the potential danger posed by unemployed former rebels—in a single bold stroke: hiring former rebels en masse for training as police. However, Biddle opposed the idea, arguing that admitting the former rebels would undermine his crucial effort to reform the police service's ethos. Kabbah sided with Biddle, and the former rebels were allowed to apply only as individuals, competing with other applicants for police jobs on the basis of merit. Biddle described his position as “one of the best decisions I made in Sierra Leone.”

Biddle instituted merit-based recruitment to replace the former system based on patronage and political or ethnic loyalty. Changing public perceptions was a key element in building citizen support for the police. One significant issue was the widespread belief that the Limba tribe, or northerners generally, dominated the police service. Biddle said the allegation was unfounded, but he also knew that he had to deal with the public perception by setting clear procedures and standards in the hiring process. To prevent applicants from receiving special treatment by exam graders, recruits were identified by codes rather than names.

The U.N. assisted in vetting recruits by administering education and character tests. In January 1999, the Criminal Investigation Department headquarters had burned down, and all criminal records had been destroyed. Without criminal records, the U.N. relied on local references including local police chiefs, community leaders and chiefs. They posted the names of recruits in villages and encouraged residents to come forward if they had information that a recruit was a former rebel. The U.N. also administered tests that measured basic English literacy and some math and other skills. Horn

said the tests were effective in identifying recruits who had fabricated education certificates.

Osman Gbla, dean of the faculty of social science and law at Fourah Bay College in Freetown, said the perception of fairness in the recruitment system was significant. “I think if you put in place transparent mechanisms of recruitment, this will not appeal to any ethnicity or religion,” he said. The only specific group that was targeted during recruitment was women, to bolster their presence in the police service. In 2008, the service had 1,445 women, representing about 15% of its 9,200 members.

Given the shaky situation at the time in Sierra Leone, training had to be fast and effective. Recruits were trained at a US\$3 million facility built by the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Sierra Leoneans led the training, with help from British and U.N. advisers. New recruits and veterans were taught fundamental police techniques for interviewing, preserving crime scenes, fingerprinting and writing crime reports. Nonessential elements were taken out of the regimen to shorten the training period and focus on skills that were deemed more important. Horn, Biddle's second in command, explained, “If we're trying to train a lot of people quickly in how to be a police officer or the basics of how to be a police officer, do they really need to know how to drill and present arms and put on marvelous parades?” Initially, a portion of the training was devoted to the use of weapons, even though general officers would serve without arms.

Training in 2001 was shortened to 12-14 weeks from six months. The new training modules focused on basic Sierra Leonean law, and the roles and responsibilities of various security agencies. Most training was scenario-based, which Horn considered a more effective approach. After several weeks of classroom training, officers gained probationary status and were assigned to field-training officers to work on patrolling and other basic tasks before returning to the classroom for four final weeks of training. Horn mentioned

that, though in theory the training regimen was good, practically it struggled because of a lack of resources at the training center, including meager food provisions.

To sensitize the police to the proper treatment of civilians, additional courses stressed respect for human rights. John Caulker, director of a Sierra Leonean nongovernmental organization called the Forum of Conscience, led the training of 1,500 police in human rights from 2001 in coordination with the U.N. The work covered basic issues like respect for human rights during arrests, standards of policing and citizens' rights. Police with the rank of sergeant and below were eligible to attend the weekly three-hour sessions. Caulker said this training and other efforts by his organization helped to spread the unfamiliar notion of human rights in Sierra Leone. "During the war, little did people know about human rights," he said. "But through this training, interviews, workshops, we were able to popularize the concept of respect for human rights."

Biddle said a crucial element of the reform process was the development of a leadership cadre to take the reins after the Commonwealth's departure. This succession plan called for selected members of the service to attend additional training in management at the Police Staff College in Bramshill, England, during 2001 and 2002. Training these leaders abroad was preferable to training them in Sierra Leone, said Biddle, "because that [Sierra Leone] is where it is all going wrong. If that's the model, what will they produce? So you've got to get them out of the country. In my view you take them out in groups, 10 to 20. You train them together in the right things, and you start to get them to work together."

Biddle said he selected officers to be sent to Bramshill based on "personal observation," including reading responses from lower- and middle-ranking police officers to a memo he issued when he arrived in Sierra Leone, in which

he described the changes he intended to implement. Some of the insightful responses he received "told us that there was a critical mass within the police service that was worth working with and supporting," according to Horn. Much of the old police leadership had moved up the ranks as a result of a promotion system based on patronage, leaving behind truly qualified personnel. Horn described the system as the "pull him down syndrome," referring to talented officers who refused to be corrupted by superiors and were consequently overlooked for promotions. Future IG Acha Brima Kamara, who held a master's degree in police and criminal-justice studies from the University of Exeter in the U.K. and already held a senior position in 1998, had served in the Sierra Leone police since 1981. However, many of the other nearly 30 people selected for additional training came from the middle ranks.

As rebel groups demobilized in 2002, the police began to expand their presence outside of Freetown and other major cities. The police expanded into areas as U.N. peacekeepers withdrew, a process that continued until the last of the peacekeepers left in 2005. During the next few years, the CCSSP donated funds to bolster police logistics. By 2004, the Commonwealth had built police barracks, donated 700 vehicles and trained Sierra Leonean police trainers.

#### *Internal oversight*

In 1998, Biddle tackled another public-perception problem by setting up the Complaints, Discipline and Internal Investigations Department (CDIID) to receive and look into public grievances regarding police misconduct. The department operated from police headquarters in Freetown and had investigators at the regional level. Inspector General Kamara, Biddle's successor, said members of the service generally considered department investigations, which often led to penalties or expulsions, to be legitimate and fair. In 2008 alone, 80 police-

service members were dismissed as a result of such probes.

However, the CDIID fell short of providing comprehensive oversight for several reasons. First, the department's managing superintendent lacked the authority to investigate complaints against higher-ranking officials, including those at the assistant inspector general and inspector general levels. Also, as a police organ, the department was subject to suspicions that probes were tainted by personal relationships. Regional investigators often had their offices in the same buildings as the police they were investigating. This weakness was addressed in 2006, when investigators from police headquarters took the lead on all cases in which police shot or seriously injured a civilian. Robert Bradley, an adviser for the Commonwealth, worked with the minister of internal affairs and Inspector General Kamara in 2008 to study the feasibility of establishing an external complaints body to support the CDIID.

Kamara said the CDIID inspired trust and respect for the police among the public. He said the investigators were "very strong" and that they "improved our legitimacy to a very large extent for the community to accept us." Despite its shortfalls, the CDIID effectively investigated hundreds of allegations of police misconduct and did not hesitate to penalize or dismiss officers. Additional mechanisms were necessary to oversee police conduct at the highest levels, but the department performed well in the cases under its jurisdiction.

#### *Partnering with the people*

At the recommendation of the CCSSP, the police service adopted a community-based approach aimed at gaining public trust and enlisting local communities in crime prevention. A central component of this effort was the establishment of Local Partnership Boards that included heads of youth groups, religious leaders, businesspeople and chiefs. The aim was to provide the public with a say in policing and to

encourage cooperation and communication between the police and citizens.

Boards were active in each geographical police division in 1999, and sub-panels addressed specific local needs. Each division had a community-relations officer who served on the partnership board along with the division head, called the local unit commander. Members of the boards met once a month to discuss local security priorities and encouraged members of the public to attend bimonthly general meetings.

The Local Partnership Boards produced several positive developments. First, the increased flow of information from the public helped in criminal investigations. Second, the boards bolstered the positive perception of the police by presenting a model for cooperation with the public.

In addition, the Local Partnership Boards served as local lobbying organizations for increased resources to enhance policing in their respective areas, including purchasing vehicles and building materials to repair stations. And to compensate for police manpower shortages, boards set up neighborhood watch groups and stepped in as mediators to negotiate civil disputes.

Still, there were indications that the police lacked any significant commitment to follow up on decisions of the partnership boards. The initiatives undertaken by the boards, such as holding workshops for police on drugs and convening conferences on school safety, were almost exclusively organized and financed by the boards' civilian members. Despite good intentions, community-relations officers were not provided with the financial resources to turn the boards' ideas and advice into concrete actions.

Additionally, some of the public viewed Local Partnership Boards as driven by elites to address their own concerns. Without standardized operating procedures from police headquarters in Freetown, boards varied greatly among districts, as some claimed close to 1,000 members while others failed to reach 100.

An informal 2004 sampling of 300 people by the police found nearly half of the respondents thought there had been “great improvement in police attitude,” and only about one in seven thought there had been “no improvement” in police conduct. Independent assessments suggested more mixed results. A 2007 police-perception survey conducted by the British government’s Justice Sector Development Program showed that 73% of Sierra Leoneans felt “fairly safe” or “very safe,” up significantly from previous years, but the results showed only modest improvements in “public respect for police” and “rating of community-police relationship.”<sup>1</sup> A 2008 survey by the African Human Security Initiative found that 75% of Sierra Leoneans were not aware of their local boards and that recognition was especially low outside of Freetown and other urban areas.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the shortcomings, Mansaray, the former national security adviser, said the partnership boards provided the public with a mechanism to relay their security concerns to the police. “By opening the police up to society, civil society included, they demanded some of these initiatives, either directly or indirectly, addressing concerns of civil society, about what the police are doing about child abuse, gender problems, wife battering, these kinds of things,” Mansaray said. “These are initiatives that were taken by the police, but I think the impulse came from society as a whole.”

### *Supporting families*

Family Support Units aimed to provide a more comfortable forum for women and children to report cases of abuse. Kadi Fakondo, who served as assistant inspector general for training and assistant inspector general for crime services, established the first such operation as a district commander in 1999, calling it the Domestic Violence Unit. She established the unit in response to incidents of domestic violence by ex-combatants against their wives that went

unreported to the police. “Because of our situation in Sierra Leone, there is a lot of family pressure, there is a lot of outside influence,” Fakondo said. “People don’t go to court; they don’t want to be stigmatized. They settle out of court. They give money to victims, and for this reason we thought it was wise to actually talk more about it. ... They (victims) were now coming to talk to us.”

The Family Support Units usually operated out of police stations, though some had separate facilities where women and children could come to report abuse. Members of the police service had to apply for these positions and were selected based on competence and demeanor toward victims. Most of the units were staffed by women because “victims relate better to women,” Fakondo said. “Women, children relate better to women.” Unit members received training in the psychology of dealing with victims of rape and other abuses as well as in identifying crimes and the specific aspects of crimes needed for successful prosecution. The Commonwealth, the U.N. and the International Rescue Committee, an NGO, prepared training modules jointly.

Family Support Units were widely considered useful and a step in the right direction. Fakondo later traveled to Liberia at the request of the U.N. to help establish a similar network there. However, in Sierra Leone, concern arose about the effectiveness of the units. A Commonwealth study conducted in 2005 found that 96% of cases of violence against women still were not reported to the police. Although many women found other ways of resolving disputes, such as going to the Sierra Leone Market Women Association, it was clear that most women were not reporting abuse. A second concern was that the units dealt with situations that were beyond the scope of normal police responsibilities. Although he praised the Family Support Units, Caulker, director of the Forum of Conscience, said the units belonged under the Ministry of Social Welfare. He was concerned about so-called mission creep, as the

police increasingly accepted responsibilities simply because the service had better resources to do so than many other understaffed Sierra Leone government agencies.

#### *Help from other groups*

In addition to neighborhood watch groups, market associations, private security organizations and local chiefs played important roles in filling the vacuum created by relatively weak police staffing. Many markets had women's associations that enforced penalties for improper behavior in the markets and provided mediation for disputes over debts. The Motor Drivers' Union and General Transport Workers' Union assisted the police in maintaining order on the roads and in minibus parking areas by checking licenses, issuing fines and banning undesirable drivers. Roughly 30 private security companies with more than 5,000 combined employees provided security to businesses and NGOs. They hired mostly demobilized military and retired police vetted by the Criminal Investigations Division. Private security firms worked alongside the armed Operational Support Division to secure diamond mines.

Chiefs played a key role in the justice system by advising people to go to the police when the matter was criminal and resolving other disputes using customary law. They dealt primarily with cases of family law, debt, inheritance and property. Additionally, chiefs had their own police units, whose primary purpose was to issue warrants and to carry out other administrative procedures, though legislation passed in 2009 named chiefs as responsible for "law and order," which contradicted previous legislation and created confusion. Horn said he was concerned with the development of what he considered a parallel police force without any accountability mechanism. He noted that the state did not ensure that the so-called chieftancy police received gender or human rights training, nor could it place any check on their ability to solicit bribes.

In contrast, the partnership boards met the needs of local communities, but applied national standards and laws, all controlled and monitored by the police.

#### OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Management of public gatherings had been a particular weakness of the Sierra Leone police. University protests, events at the national football stadium, and political rallies often turned violent, at times in spite of police efforts and at other times exacerbated by police actions. A columnist from the Freetown-based *Standard Times* referred to one particularly bloody university protest in 2004 as a "manifestation of the ineptitude of our police to adequately perform to their responsibilities to the state."<sup>3</sup>

Past policy had provided for two stages of response in the handling of public gatherings that might become violent. In the initial stage, unarmed constables, called general-duty officers, would attempt to maintain order. If they struggled, armed officers of the Operational Support Division would be called in; these officers often resorted to excessively violent methods, including the use of live ammunition and tear gas. Garry Horlacher, former security-sector reform adviser with DFID and a U.N. adviser to the Office on National Security, argued for the addition of a middle step that would involve constables who were trained in crowd control and were relatively lightly armed. He said such situations required a group of "regular officers who are well used to dealing with people on the street, feel comfortable in their own ability to deal with people at that face-to-face level, rather than hiding behind a shield or whatever but are given some techniques that show them to the crowd to be trained and confident in dealing with crowd situations."

Beginning in 2006, in preparation for presidential elections the following year, the U.N. and DFID trained 2,200 general-duty officers in crowd control techniques. These officers mainly

worked in their regular units but were activated in special crowd control units during election rallies and other public gatherings. The UNDP provided helmets, batons, tear gas canisters, shotguns and rubber bullets. The officers followed a step-by-step progression of non-lethal actions to manage crowds, beginning with forming corridors and escalating to using shields, charging and pushing people, firing rubber bullets and using gas. The units performed well during the 2007 elections, patrolling several political rallies, including an All People's Congress rally that drew an estimated 100,000 attendees, without any fatalities reported. However, these units disintegrated after the elections, as personnel were transferred between units and locations. The Operational Support Division's riot control units essentially replaced crowd control units but were rarely called upon.

## ASSESSING RESULTS

Although the Sierra Leone police made substantial improvements in logistical capacity, strategic management and community relations between 1998 and 2008, crucial weaknesses remained.

The CCSSP built barracks for the Sierra Leone police, provided hundreds of vehicles and communications equipment, and trained and advised police at all ranks for more than a decade. Recruitment and promotion procedures were made transparent and merit-based. Officers operated with greater professionalism, a result of human rights training and improved equipment. Better uniforms boosted morale and helped build respect among the public. An internal CDIID survey in 2007 found that 70% of Sierra Leoneans supported the performance of the police.

A new infrastructure, with organizations such as the Office of National Security and National Security Council, improved communication within the police service and between the police and other security agencies. The different groups understood their mandates and respected the roles

of other groups. Crucially, the military respected the role of the police and refrained from intervening in circumstances such as public gatherings.

Senior police leaders were highly capable and provided long-term strategic direction. Gbla, of Fourah Bay College, said, "When you have a strategic management system wherein top people do lots of thinking—critical reflections on how to carry about policing—that creates sanity in the police force. That creates foresight. That creates informed decisions on policy making."

However, lower-ranking police lacked adequate training. Many were illiterate and unaware of basic laws and citizens' rights. Additionally, low salaries and welfare benefits contributed to petty corruption and a high rate of attrition. As the size of the police service expanded to 12,000 after 2008, the money available for police reforms, including donations from DFID, diminished. This decline in support reflected Sierra Leone's improving social and political stability as well as growing momentum for efforts to reform the army. As a result, the police service could not maintain its stock of vehicles, communications equipment and personnel. Horn called the situation resulting from a lack of resources, "potentially destabilizing."

Several innovative programs improved cooperation between the police and local communities. Family Support Units provided forums for women and children to report domestic abuse and sexual violence to specially trained officers. Local Partnership Boards served as mechanisms for the police to gather input from communal leaders, learn about communal security priorities, and extend its reach by involving the public in maintaining law and order. However, these programs did not penetrate deeply into communities in Sierra Leone. Although the Family Support Units responded well to complaints, the vast majority of cases of domestic violence still went unreported. Similarly, the

Local Partnership Boards addressed the needs primarily of their civilian members and did not have much impact on their broader communities. And although these programs performed well in many instances, they did not cover substantial parts of the country. The partnership boards in particular lacked the resources to turn ideas to improve security into operational programs.

## REFLECTIONS

The progress and problems of the Sierra Leone police provide insights relevant to police reform in other contexts.

The Sierra Leone police service improved its logistical capacity considerably. However, many of the improvements were funded by the Commonwealth, raising doubts about the sustainability of the higher equipment standards as donor support diminished. The police needed to replace more than 100 vehicles every year just to maintain current levels. Furthermore, an internal needs assessment recommended increasing the size of the police service to 12,000, though the police in 2008 lacked the financial resources to pay sufficient wages to its force of 9,200.

In 2004-05, both the Sierra Leone police and their Commonwealth advisers recognized the need to address reform of the justice sector as a whole. Improvements in criminal investigations and arrests were undermined by ineffective court and prison systems. As in other areas such as Kosovo and Burundi, these weaknesses subverted police reform. Sierra Leone leaders and Commonwealth advisers adjusted their reform priorities to reflect this understanding. Still, police reform would have been more successful more quickly if other parts of the justice sector

had been reformed during the same period.

The police improved relations with local communities through the Police Local Partnership Boards and by displaying greater professionalism in their work. However, lower-ranking police—the constables who patrolled and interacted most closely with public—received the least training. Efforts to improve community relations were hobbled because many police at the street level lacked knowledge of basic laws and citizens' rights.

Finally, the governmental justice sector, including the police and other agencies, was just one group of several providing security and dispute resolutions to the Sierra Leonean public. Others included neighborhood watch groups, private security firms and local chiefs. Although the police recognized and generally appreciated the contributions of these groups, the nongovernmental groups had no role in police strategic planning and were not effectively monitored by the police to ensure proper conduct. Rather than creating parallel institutions, particularly in rural areas, to perform functions similar to those of local chiefs, the police could have considered co-opting or better coordinating these groups.

Osman Gbla, of Fourah Bay College, explained that given the history of conflict in Sierra Leone, citizens were going to do everything they could to secure the country and not rely entirely on official security agencies. "The one thing that is coming out in this country, clearly, is that people no longer joke with the security, because of the lessons of the war," Gbla said. "They don't want to take security lightly. So they see it as a very serious business. They don't just leave it in the hands of the security forces."

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- <sup>2</sup> Chikwanha, Dr. Annie Barbara. "A Survey of Crime Victims in Sierra Leone." *African Human Security Initiative*. November 2008. <http://www.africanreview.org/docs/sierraleone/CrimeSurveySierraLeone.pdf>. Accessed 25 October 2011.
- <sup>3</sup> Issa, Mohamed. "Riotous Conduct on the Increase: Who is Responsible?" *Standard Times*. 7 June 2006. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200606080837.html>. Accessed 25 October 2011.



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