A 'Force for Good'? Police Reform in Post-conflict Sierra Leone

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Abstract The Sierra Leone Police Force has its origins in British colonial administration. After Independence and with the consolidation of one-party rule the force slid into disrepute. The outbreak of civil conflict in 1991 largely decimated the force but the gradual restoration of peace provided an opportunity for police reform. This article covers the aspects of the political and institutional environment that helped engender change, as well as constraints faced by the reform agenda. It considers how the officers actually carried out the task at hand, and shares lessons as to what reform tactics worked and which were less successful. While several challenges remain, the reform programme has been largely successful, hinging on – among other factors – the appointment of a British Inspector General of Police; the availability of a core of reform-minded officers; long-term external technical and financial assistance; and a conducive political environment for change.

1 Introduction

Much has been written about Sierra Leone's security sector reform (SSR), after the country's civil war officially ended in 2002. The Sierra Leone Police (SLP), in particular, has received much attention (Meek 2003; Baker 2005, 2006; Gbla *et al*. 2009; Albrecht and Jackson 2009; Albrecht 2010). This article documents the process from the perspective of Sierra Leonean Police officers who were key to the reform.[1] It covers the aspects of the political and police force environment that helped engender change, as well as constraints faced. It considers how the officers actually carried out the task at hand, what reform tactics worked and which were more problematic.

The article begins with a background to the SLP, particularly in the run-up to the country's civil conflict, which began in 1991. It then documents the journey of the SLP through the conflict, and the origins of the reform process. The experience of reform is then discussed. Finally, we discuss the challenges that the SLP still faces and conclude by drawing out key lessons.

2 Background to the SLP

The Sierra Leone Police has its origin in the West Africa Frontier Force which, between 1863 and 1906, was responsible for maintaining

Britain's colonial frontier in the region, and maintaining law and order (essentially armed resistance against Britain's attempt to govern its Protectorate). From 1906 the force was modelled after the British police force and became part of the colonial civil service. Local officers were sent on various training programmes in Britain and/or other colonial territories. The Force was considered one of the best and well disciplined forces in colonial British West Africa.

The SLP gradually evolved over the years, and assumed the status of a community security force, moving away from a role that mainly consisted of defending British colonial interests. But it was a wholly colonial instrument, with its senior ranks staffed by retired and seconded British officers. Between 1955–56, the force was twice highly commended by Royal Commissions for its excellent handling of civil disturbances in Freetown and the provinces.

However, during this period, Sierra Leone began moving towards Independence, with indigenous Africans beginning to take on significant roles in government and the civil service. This included the SLP, and by the time of Sierra Leone's independence in 1961, the force had virtually been Africanised. In 1963 the first Sierra Leonean Commissioner of Police was appointed.

In 1964, Parliament passed an Act to consolidate and amend the 'Law relating to the Organisation, Discipline, Power and Duties of the Police', setting up, among other things, a Police Council, with the Minister of the Interior as Chairman. This Act further defined the roles of the Sierra Leone Police Force as 'The detection of crime and the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of Law and Order, the protection of life and property, and the due enforcement of all Laws and Regulations with which they are directly charged' (The Sierra Leone Police Act, Act No 4 of 1964).

While before and shortly after Independence, the police force maintained a neutral role in national politics, with the consolidation of power by then President Siaka Stevens, and the introduction of the One-Party Constitution in 1978, its role was radically altered and compromised. The Commissioner of Police was made a member of the ruling party, a nominated Member of Parliament and a Cabinet Minister. This marked the turning point in the history of the force. The period also witnessed the change of nomenclature from Commissioner of Police to Inspector General of Police (IG), in 1985. This politicised position of the IG created imbalances in the political allegiance, which had far-reaching effects on police recruitment procedures, management, administration and promotion. This lowered ethical standards and morale, contributed to a breakdown of discipline, and encouraged corruption. This also jeopardised police credibility among the citizenry.

As a result, most Police Officers developed a lackadaisical attitude towards their job, further eroding public confidence. This collective lack of confidence found expression in indifferent attitudes and even greater ineffectiveness in police service delivery.

The government did make some attempts to reverse the decline of the police. For instance, in 1984 a Cadet Officer Programme was instituted to promote recruitment among university graduates. The policy may have been instigated by Stevens in an attempt to limit the pressures exerted by members of his party to provide jobs for their dependants. The programme ensured that graduates would enter the police force at the relatively senior rank of Cadet Assistant Superintendents. The recruitment was somewhat successful, with 18 graduates from different backgrounds joining in the inaugural year.

The nature of their recruitment had made them household names. As Chris Charley, one of the 18, notes:

> The police force at this time was perceived to be an organisation that attracted only mediocre people, so when the 18 of us came in, overnight we started getting attention – the media zoomed in on the SLP to see how these new graduates were getting on and what changes they would bring to the police force… the limelight was on us; anything we did came within the public domain and it has its own advantages and disadvantages (Charley, interview, 2010).

With regard to relations with other members of the police, however, there were distinct disadvantages. In a context where officers were threatened with dismissal for attempting to hold on to the basic competencies of the profession, corruption-resistant police often found their promotion blocked. At one point, most of the cadre that entered in 1984 found their expected promotion to the position of Deputy Superintendent of Police blocked for four years.

With ambitious officers being held back, the force continued its downward spiral. This general malaise was reflected in all aspects of civil service and government conduct, considered to be one of the main contributing factors to the Sierra Leone conflict that broke out in 1991. As direct representatives of a corrupt and ineffective government, police personnel and buildings were a particular target of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) insurgency.[2]

In 1992, junior elements of the army staged a coup against the Joseph Momoh government, which had taken over one-party rule from Stevens in 1985. After the coup it was clear that the sympathies of the military administration rested with certain elements of the police, particularly those whose progress had been restricted, and with whom they had close professional relations. This was demonstrated by the new administration's double promotion of those officers that had been constrained by the political machinations of the previous government.

By the outbreak of the civil war in 1991 then, it was clear that the police were a wholly demoralised, heavily politicised and unprofessional force. The war, however, gave some elements a sense of purpose, fighting alongside the army, a relationship that strengthened once the army assumed power in 1992. However, the military regime, enjoying the windfalls associated with being in government, soon began to behave like its predecessors, contributing to the further de-professionalisation of the Police, to the extent that senior elements became involved in wide-scale forgery and mismanagement. On the eve of Sierra Leone's return to democratic multi-party rule, the SLP was rife with corruption, devoid of legitimacy and teetering on the brink of decay.

3 Initiating reforms

As part of the move towards returning the country to democracy in 1996, several advisory councils were set up. One such body was the Advisory Council on the Present and Future Challenges of the Sierra Leone Police Force, headed by Dr Alhaji Tejan Kabbah, a former lawyer and retired senior United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) official.

The Advisory Council recommended:

- a restoration of the friendly image of the police, to ensure good community relations;
- the establishment of a planning unit that would be able to project the training and equipment needs of the police force;
- the establishment of a Police Council (a provision contained in Section 156 of Act No 6 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone), with powers to make recommendations on policy issues affecting the police;
- SLP decentralisation, with an Inspector General, a Deputy Inspector General and a Senior Commissioner at the headquarters in Freetown, and officers at each provincial level, and at divisional headquarters;
- trimming of the SLP's ranks, keeping only essential, positively functional policemen;
- expanding the system of promotion and exams, and encouraging the intake of capable university graduates by raising their points of admission to Cadets Officers;
- equipping the force adequately to enable it to operate efficiently, by improving the emolument and conditions of service of officers.

Kabbah was elected as Sierra Leone's President in 1996. As former chairman on the Police Advisory Council, a priority was to ensure that the recommendations of the Council were taken forward.

The Police Council was established under the Chairmanship of the Vice-President, Dr Albert Joe Demby. The Council developed a working document titled 'Policing Ethics' – a 12-paragraph booklet setting the standards for the performance of Police Officers to meet by the new millennium. Furthermore, Regional Commissioners were appointed for the North, South and Eastern Provinces.

In its efforts, the government was supported by a number of development partners including, significantly, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and UNDP. Other agencies and International Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), such as ActionAid, supported the rehabilitation of police infrastructures. Reputable national management organisations, such as the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) and CORD-Sierra Leone, also provided the SLP with training and materials.

Plans were derailed by a coup d'état on 25 May 1997, by rebel elements of the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), who collaborated with the RUF to create a joint Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)-RUF regime. It was common practice for invading rebels to target and eliminate established law enforcement groups in order to establish their primacy so upon entering Freetown their first activities included targeting the police and the prisons, releasing many prisoners. The military junta viewed the police with suspicion for having collaborated with the overthrown government and senior officers were summoned to the Cockerill Military Headquarters and warned against feeding information to the now-exiled government in Guinea.

Many senior Police Officers fled the country. But despite the difficult period some of those with integrity found a way to stay, realising the need to provide leadership, particularly given that within the military regime, it was virtually non-existent. The Deputy Inspector General, Kandeh Bangura deserves particular mention; many Police Officers feel that if he had left, the integrity of

the state would have been completely destroyed. Although Bangura was from the Limba ethnic group and therefore close by association to the Limba-dominated junta leadership, he was not considered to be a junta supporter.

The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) eventually drove the AFRC-RUF alliance out of Freetown in March 1998 and restored the Kabbah government to power, which continued with the reform process. A special request was made to the Commonwealth and the UN, which saw the arrival of two International Police teams under the auspices of the Commonwealth Police Development Task Force (CPDTF) and the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL).

The teams included a number of experienced Police Officers. It was probably an advantage both that there were two groups of advisors involved, and that the members of the two groups were from a range of different countries. The head of the Commonwealth Police Taskforce, Keith Biddle was from the UK, as was his deputy, Adrian Horn, and Chief Inspector David Tingle, but the other members came from Zimbabwe, Canada and Sri Lanka. The members of UNOMSIL's police teams hailed from Namibia, Kenya, Norway, India and Malaysia.

Everyone… 'had different experiences of policing and worked with different models' (Horn, quoted in Albrecht and Jackson 2009: 31). This meant that there was more commitment to developing a model that was appropriate to the Sierra Leone context. However, as the officers hailed mostly from Commonwealth countries (former British colonies), they did have one significant area of policing in common – the tradition of a common law, rather than civil law system.[3]

President Kabbah announced the Sierra Leone Police Charter in August 1998, which established the primacy of the police as providers of internal security in Sierra Leone, and reiterated the importance of police reform. Its overall aim was 'to see a reborn Sierra Leone Police, which will be a *force for good* in our Nation' (Sierra Leone Policing Charter 1998).

Unfortunately, these lofty ambitions were summarily halted by an offensive on Freetown by

AFRC-RUF forces on 6 January 1999. Once again they were repelled by a combination of ECOMOG and Civil Defence Forces (CDF) troops but the offensive took its toll on both the civilian population and the police, who were targeted once more.

The Criminal Investigations Department Headquarters was burnt down, causing an irrecoverable loss of documents, records, and case files. Recently acquired equipment under the funding assistance of UNOMSIL and the CPDTF was either vandalised or looted. Within 48 hours of the invasion the number of police vehicles was reduced from some 60 to five. An estimated 250 Police Officers were killed, some along with their families and dependents. About 164 million Leones meant for police salaries was stolen from the Pay and Quarter Master's Offices at Police Headquarters; and the police armoury in Kingtom[4] looted (Charley 1999).

The 'January 6' invasion, as it came to be known, presented a huge setback, rendering the force unable to perform its duties, even after the invasion was repelled and calm restored. Nevertheless, although peace would not be definitive until 2000, the Kabbah government returned to its ambitious task of reforming the police, supported by its international partners.[5] The single-most important action of immediate significance was Kabbah's interim appointment of the Head of the CPDTF, Keith Biddle, a retired Assistant Chief Constable from Manchester, UK, as Sierra Leone's interim Inspector General of Police.

As problematic as the appointment may have appeared, it proved a stroke of genius by the Kabbah administration. By bringing in someone with no political affiliation or attachments, the government ensured that difficult decisions to bring about change had a chance of being pushed through. Moreover, it was important to demonstrate to the populace a radical break from the past. Further, most Sierra Leoneans felt profound gratitude towards foreigners,[6] and particularly the British, after the UK's military intervention in 2000 brought the war to a definitive end.[7] Furthermore, the control of the SLP by the British during the colonial period was still part of many people's living memory. While it had served as an instrument of the colonial government, it had at least been respected as a

highly professional force. Given Sierra Leone's limited strategic importance to the UK government, the appointment also had the benefit of not appearing political or neocolonial.

Furthermore, reform-minded police were in favour of the appointment, as the SLP did not have anyone who would have provided credible leadership at the time. As Sierra Leone is an extremely neopatrimonial[8] country, jobs and opportunities often come down to who you know, and who you are related to. This makes it very difficult to hire and fire people at will, and can make progress slow. A great advantage of having a foreigner in place was that he could ignore such machinations.

However, not all senior officers were on board:

> When the restructuring of the SLP came [it was as if] we (all SLP officers) were all standing on the platform... There were those of us who were ready to jump on board this [restructuring] train. There were those standing in the middle very confused – should I get on the train or not, what benefit am I going to get from this? And then there was a third group – I do not want change. I'm not going to get on board this train. So we had... [to] work hard to convince others to come on board (Fakondo, interview, 2011).

Biddle pursued two tactics – one included identifying reform-minded Police Officers to work with. In doing so he ignored seniority – a core aspect of a hierarchical organisation like the police – in favour of his own perception of competence. To this end, he identified a number of relatively young people, promoted them and sent them to the UK for training, to create a reservoir of people who shared his vision.

The other tactic was to neutralise or get rid of spoilers outright. He found ways to retire people he felt he could not work with, by invoking a clause within the civil service wherein the Head of Department can retire staff from his institution before they reach the age of retirement, as long as valid reasons are given. Other tactics included luring them out of the organisation with secondments.[9]

Predictably, not all Biddle's tactics were particularly welcomed. His style was sometimes reminiscent of the 'divide and rule' approach of the colonial regime in the 1800s. Some competent, reform-minded police that were not Biddle's 'blue-eyed boys and girls' were left out – particularly as he focused on people who he perceived *he* could work with (Charley, interview, 2010). Eventually, however, he came to appreciate this group and their abilities, and promoted them accordingly.

In any case, Biddle left in 2003, and was replaced, on his recommendation, by Brima Acha Kamara. Kabbah's approval of the recommendation spoke volumes about new attitudes to police appointments, as Kamara was seen as aligned to the main opposition party of the time, the All People's Congress (APC). It indicated that Biddle had left a legacy that gave preference to competence rather than seniority or political affiliation. Kamara maintained and continued many of Biddle's reforms, successfully steering the country through the 2007 elections, which saw a peaceful change of government, from the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) to the APC. The election of Biddle's protégés to the highest office of the SLP continued with the appointment of Francis Munu (who had served as Biddle's Operations Officer) to the position of IG in 2010.

Before he left, Biddle tried to ensure that the group he had promoted was in place to continue the work. He had sourced a number of senior officers from the Cadet Officer Programme described above, along with more recent university graduates. The reform process presented them with the opportunity to realise the vision of the police they had joined years before (interviews, Charley and Fakondo 2011). Indeed, during the reform period, the Cadet Officer squad made and continue to make up the majority of the senior ranks of the Sierra Leone Police, including AIGs Chris Charley and Kadi Fakondo. The current IG, Francis Munu is also a graduate of the programme.

4 Reform in practice
The reforms themselves were wide-ranging and ambitious. Internally, efforts had to be made to curb corruption and encourage the police to take pride in their vocation. Externally, there was a real need to strengthen civilian oversight of the police, as well as to improve relations with the public. Furthermore, the war had brought untold destruction to police infrastructure and logistical equipment.

The Research and Planning Department (R&P) of the SLP led the way with the internal restructuring process. In 1998 it sent out questionnaires to serving personnel, soliciting their views on what they wanted the police force to look like, the limiting factors preventing them from doing their jobs properly, and so on. Suggestion boxes were put up at the various police stations, successfully allowing more timid personnel to make 'faceless' contributions.

The information gathered from the questionnaires and suggestion boxes informed the SLP strategic plan's priority areas, with projects accordingly introduced to achieve the objectives. Since 1999, the strategic planning cycle has been a major area of progress in the way the SLP works, and contributes towards SLP's aim to get the best use out of the organisation's 'scarce human, material and financial resources' (SLP 2008). It is a highly participatory exercise, comprising performance reviews, research on the operating environment, and extensive consultation with stakeholders, including members of the general public.

Abridged versions of strategic planning documents are now produced as standard, for dissemination to the media, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other stakeholders, so they are aware of what the police are supposed to be doing and can hold them to account. They are also disseminated to the various divisions all over the country, which are asked to regularly monitor their progress towards achieving the plan.

Another significant internal reform was the establishment of the Executive Management Board (EMB), comprising the IG, the Deputy Inspector General and all the AIGs (there are AIGs for each main department of the SLP: Professional Standards; Operations; Crime Services; Support Services; and Personnel Training and Welfare, as well as for each of the four regions – North, South, East and West). Before the restructuring, management of the police was a one-man show, headed by the Inspector General of Police. Under the new system, the EMB convenes weekly to discuss strategic management and personnel decisions.

There is a clear chain for disseminating decisions made at Executive Board level, which its members, the AIGs, are tasked with rolling out.

In the regions they are responsible for, AIGs meet with their Local Unit Commanders (LUCs) to discuss what has been decided on. The EMB model is replicated at divisional level, with each LUC heading a Tasking Coordination Group (TCG), which they are expected to convene regularly to review and plan policing within their divisions. This chain is supplemented by Force Orders (internal memoranda), and a lot of information is disseminated by being read at morning parades and so forth, ensuring that decisions flow from top to bottom.

Other significant changes pertain to recruitment, retention, promotion and remuneration policies. Prior to the restructuring, corruption was rife in the recruitment of Police Officers, with the result that many uneducated, unqualified people joined the force. New standards for basic recruits include: being a Sierra Leone citizen; education at least until the fourth grade; ability to pass a written exam in English, Maths and General Studies; no criminal record; mental and physical fitness (which involves passing a medical that includes an HIV test); and being between the ages of 18 and 25. Efforts were made to ensure that Police Officers were paid a living wage. Attention was also paid to other non-remunerative factors, such as ensuring officers were supplied with new uniforms and boots.

A related reform, but one that proved extremely unpopular, was the decision to change the ranking structure, reducing the number of ranks from 19 to nine. The previous bloated structure had been very inefficient, making oversight and decision-making difficult, distorting roles, and hiding and allowing the promotion of incompetent officers.

The move came under a lot of criticism, particularly as people in ranks that were phased out were more often demoted to a lower rank than promoted. Efforts were made, however, to ensure those who lost out still remained committed to the reform. For instance, the frustrations of the officers whose ranks were phased out were managed by ensuring that their salaries did not change when they were demoted.

Other internal control measures undertaken involved the creation of specialised departments, including (Charley 2008):

- The *Complaint, Discipline and Internal Investigation Department*, which deals with complaints from members of the public against SLP personnel.
- The *Internal Audit Department*, which carries out regular audits to ensure the organisation adheres to financial and monetary regulations.
- The *Corporate Service Department*, which provides technical advice, guidance and timely information to help management to formulate policies to allocate, manage, monitor and control the use of SLP's limited resources.
- The *Equal Opportunity Department*, which was set up to ensure that every member of the SLP enjoys equal opportunity irrespective of age, sex, religion, tribe, etc.

Bottom-up policing was promoted through extensive consultations with members of the public at the start of the reform process, in town and village meetings, public perception surveys, and civil society consultations. Apart from the Complaints Department, a variety of systems and procedures were also put in place to maintain good relations with the public. A proactive Community Relations Department works with communities. A Human Rights Unit and Media and Public Relations Department ensures that the public is both provided with timely information about police activities and supported to provide inputs to the Police Strategy and activities. Members of the public also have recourse to the Ombudsman.

Top-down oversight of the police was also reformed, with the reinstitution of a Police Council headed by the country's Vice-President. Its functions include advising the President on all major matters of policy relating to internal security, and (with the President's approval) making regulations related to the SLP's performance.

Additionally, a Parliamentary Oversight Committee oversees the SLP's activities and has the power to question its operations. Parliament also has the powers to summon SLP management to give justifications for certain actions or demands (Charley 2008: 115).

4.1 Policing with and for the community
Early on it was recognised that the police would not be able to maintain law and order by themselves, and would require the assistance of the wider community. However, there was a

conscious effort made to ensure that Sierra Leone's experience of Community Policing – an approach strongly influencing the Commonwealth Task Force, and particularly espoused by its British members – was not subject to preconceived notions of Community Policing (Albrecht and Jackson 2009).[10]

Sierra Leone's experience was not only different from what the task force members had experienced before, it was also clear that different parts of the country were going to require different types of community engagement. In some areas, people were only familiar with traditional forms of authority. Further, some areas had been under RUF control for years, while in other communities CDF fighters had taken over the provision of security, and maintaining law and order. Therefore, a system was needed that was flexible enough to engage with these different needs in different communities.

Charley experienced this while attempting to consolidate police presence in the Southern Province, a region where (1) Civil Defence Forces (in this region known as Kamajors)[11] had taken over responsibility for maintaining law and order in some areas and (2) traditional authority held sway in others:

> The Kamajors were formed of the people and had fought to re-establish freedom and security in various regions. They were widely respected and believed themselves to have a legitimate claim to managing security… After the war, the Kamajors were trusted, the police were not… Although the Kamajors were not the legitimate body to administer justice we still needed to work with them. They had been there when we were nowhere in sight… By inviting their representatives [in Bo] to shadow our investigation branch they were able to see the extent to which the SLP had been reformed in terms of accountability and professionalism. Working in cooperation with the Kamajors had the benefit of not only inducting them into police procedure but also of empowering them to register and process members of their group who had committed crimes. This alliance developed further into an arrangement whereby the Kamajors were allowed to access their members after formal processing and administer civil justice in cases we deemed to be less serious, for example

domestic rather than criminal cases... [G]radually everyone from both sides agreed that it was working; on our part, the police were transparent in their dealings, accountable to the public and the Kamajors worked within the parameters of their cooperative role until we were finally able to take complete control of administering law and order in Bo (compiled from information provided by Charley during interview, 2011).

Another example, with regard to traditional authority:

One experience that highlights the importance of policing in tandem with traditional authority, involve[ed] a particularly sensitive case concerning a girl aged about seven. Her mother came to the police distraught, to report that her daughter had been abducted and initiated into the Bondo society. Although formal arms of the law rarely get involved in traditional practices, in this case, the mother was reporting an abduction, which the police could not ignore. However, as serious an offence as kidnapping was, and the forced initiation of the girl represented human rights abuse, it was still a particularly sensitive issue because it involved complex traditional law... in this case it was essential to 'think outside the box' due to the power of the Bondo Society[12] – as much guardians of culture as of community – in Sierra Leone traditions. My knowledge of local customs dictated that the obvious course of action would be to approach the Paramount Chief... the ultimate judge in all family disputes, and final authority in all traditional, ceremonial and domestic matters... In areas of limited police presence, the paramount authority and their chiefdom police are responsible for maintaining law and order... After listening to a report of the situation, the Chief explained that no initiation could take place without the knowledge of the Chief Sowie,[13] and he summoned her immediately. She denied all knowledge of the initiation... It was thus deduced that this particular 'Bondo Bush' had been arranged outside of the traditional convention, by a woman who had ascribed to herself the title and power of a Sowie.[14] However, whether sanctioned or not, the self-elected Sowie was still a Bondo member, and well-respected in the community. Moreover

the Bondo Bush is taboo to men, so male Police Officers could hardly storm in to rescue the girls she was initiating. The best way to justify a police intrusion would be on medical grounds, due to the girls having been initiated outside the traditional context without appropriate oversight... I approached the Chief Medical Officer at the Bo hospital in search of a female nurse who could not only handle any potential medical problems but who was also a member of the Bondo Society. The Chief Ward Sister fit these requirements and agreed to accompany the police team. Female Police Officers under command were gathered and the situation explained. Anyone who was not a society member was excused from the mission... although they had already been initiated, we were successful in rescuing the girls from the grossly unhygienic conditions in which they were being kept (compiled from information provided by Charley during interview 2011).

These examples demonstrate the fine balance that needs to be struck between a responsibility to serve the public, highly sensitive political and cultural interests, and power of traditional authorities. The latter case also highlights the necessity of working with other institutions, such as the medical profession, in the SLP's effort to safeguard the security of citizens.

Given the need to ensure the effective operation of the police, it was clear that a system of policing, with community engagement at the centre, was necessary. Local Needs Policing (LNP) was developed as a way of capturing the locale-specific nature of policing required, but one that could be delivered within a 'national framework of standards and guidelines' (Albrecht and Jackson 2009: 32).

The main structure driving LNP is the Local Policing Partnership Board (LPPB), a partnership between the SLP and the community in each of Sierra Leone's 32 police divisions. It is coordinated by the LUC but the board is populated by upstanding members of the community from different walks of life, including Paramount Chiefs, religious leaders, women's group leaders and so on (a member of the police is normally involved in the capacity of secretary, to ensure that meetings are well documented; some capacity training is also provided). The

LPPB comprises a Chair (who also sits on the TCG) and members that coordinate joint patrols, and get involved in neighbourhood watch, intelligence gathering, and so on.

While LPPBs vary from division to division, some are extremely proactive, and have been very helpful in supporting the police in their work. Their activities are varied: they help decide which issues the police should prioritise; they highlight areas of high crime and where more resources need to be applied; members inspect police cells; and they support their local police units by lobbying MPs on their behalf. The police believe LPPBs are one of the reasons that the public's confidence in them has grown.

While Police Officers are present in an estimated 80 per cent of the country, few are deployed in remote areas. LPPBs, however, tend to be present in even the most remote areas and stand in for the police (although all perpetrators they catch are still handed over to the police as soon as possible). While the LPPB is at division-level, divisions are further sub-divided into smaller communities. These coordinate Community Safety Volunteers (CSVs) – able-bodied men and women in good standing with the community (recommended by the community and further vetted by the police). CSVs help the police by regularly patrolling their neighbourhoods. They are easily identified by vests provided by the police, and are empowered to conduct citizens' arrests. It is important to note that they are *not* vigilantes. In fact, one indication that there is increased trust in and collaboration between communities and the police are the increased numbers of arrested people that are being brought to the police after citizen arrests, rather than the community dealing with it themselves (e.g. through mob justice).

As indicated above, a range of new departments were introduced to ensure that reforms were taken forward and sustained. However, other departments were created after the fact – arising from specific needs stemming from the particularities of the post-conflict environment. One such department was the Family Support Unit (FSU), established in 2001 to respond to cases relating to sexual and gender-based violence. The FSU grew out of the Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) started at Kissi police station (in the east end of Freetown) where Kadi

Fakondo was based just after the conflict ended. Women, including 'bush wives' (girls and women who had been abducted during the conflict) started coming in to report rape and other abuses. Unable to address the issues within the existing structure the Fakondo set up the DVU (Fakondo, interview, 2011; Fakondo 2009). This was scaled up as the FSU with the support of external consultants, and piloted in Freetown. The idea caught like wildfire and was quickly rolled out across the country. Police Officers and social workers were trained by the commonwealth team, with DFID providing funding. The FSU also worked closely with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other NGOs such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC).[15]

5 Challenges and the road ahead
Despite the sweeping changes outlined above, many questions remain. In the face of dwindling international support and interest, how sustainable will the reforms described above be? In a country still riddled with corruption at all levels of government, how immune is the SLP? In a context in which the public is increasingly dissatisfied with their levels of public service, how engaged with local needs policing will they continue to be?

A number of the challenges facing the police were well documented by Al Shek Kamara, a former Chief Superintendent of Police, in his essay that formed part of his application for promotion to the rank of AIG in 2005, titled 'Future Challenges facing the Sierra Leone Police Force'.

Referring to the community policing strategy, Kamara (2005: 15) noted that it 'is yet to gain full acceptance by a good number of… police personnel who are merely paying lip service to it'. As with many reforms it is not easy to change things overnight, and 'attempting to switch from a highly centralised, authoritarian structure to a decentralised, democratic approach in a relatively short period of time is… a difficult undertaking' (*ibid.*).

Further, changing the rank and file's attitude towards the discharging of their duty probably remains one of the greatest challenges to the reform process. This is exacerbated by the fact that despite efforts to improve conditions of

service, their pay and benefits remain relatively low. With ever decreasing international support, the concern is that invariably, old practices will start creeping back in.

Police discipline and honesty remain a huge issue. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the traffic management department of the police who interface with the public all day, every day. Accordingly, their (mis)conduct is amplified as representative of the whole police force – evidenced by public perception surveys (Vincent 2008) but, according to senior officers, it is more perception than reality, as police statistics show increasing numbers of traffic fines being paid – indicating that traffic police are not being paid off to turn a blind eye but are actually fining offenders and charging them to court. In fact, the police bring significant amounts of money to the national coffers in the form of accruals from fines. Furthermore, corrupt practices are no longer condoned, as in the past. That they are a reality is recognised by the police management, but it is fighting hard to address the problem. There are severe repercussions for anyone caught taking bribes. Also, there are now structures in place within the institution (such as the complaints division) where people who are aggrieved by unfair police practice can make complaints.

Police training tries to play its part – extensive courses are taught on ethics. However, whether this becomes internalised depends on the cadre of the individual being taught, and recruitment procedures, despite stricter eligibility requirements, remain problematic. Kamara states:

> A good number of recruits have found their way into the organisation by presenting fake documents indicating educational qualification and age… Yet these people are allowed into the organisation because of influence and cover-up by some unscrupulous personnel involved in the selection process. If this situation is not closely monitored… the organisation will soon be overwhelmed with a bunch of old semi-literates akin to the political era and unfit for the demands of community policing (Kamara 2005: 12).

Another problem regarding recruitment is the difficulty in attracting female graduates from the universities and other tertiary institutions. Efforts to overcome this include outreach programmes at universities and the accelerated female graduate scheme, in operation since 2007 (Elizabeth Turay, interview, 2011).

Maintaining a commitment to the range of reforms discussed above and continuing their spread across the country, while ensuring adequate logistics and infrastructure, has colossal financial implications. There is a big question as to what happens when donor funding runs out, which apart from for particular activities – such as providing support for policing elections – it is more or less doing. This is in a context where the police force needs to grow from its current capacity of 9,500 to a 12,000-strong force to ensure effectiveness.

As largely negative public perceptions indicate, it has been a real challenge to manage the public's expectations. Senior Police Officers feel that the force is being judged against Biddle's success. During his time, however, the force was inundated with resources that allowed the police to be professional in both its outlook and its service delivery. The nine years since he left have coincided with donor fatigue, or donor diversion to other areas, both within Sierra Leone, and to other post-conflict countries. The reduced assistance to the organisation has invariably had an impact on both its professionalism and its ability to respond to crimes.

Other challenges arising from the lack of funds is the force's capacity to actually fight crime, particularly the more sophisticated forms of criminality it is increasingly faced with, such as cybercrime; money laundering; drug smuggling; and human trafficking. The force continues to lag behind in technological advancements, including computer, forensic and CCTV technology, severely affecting its abilities (Kamara 2005). Furthermore, limited funds make it difficult for the police to address issues stemming from the recent history of conflict. This includes the challenge of the large number of disaffected, war-hardened youth concentrated in the main cities and towns, who often resort to illicit activities to fund their existence.

The government has been grappling with its own lack of revenue, meaning its assistance to the police has not been very robust or timely, which impairs the force's well-laid strategic plans. There will definitely be a need to juggle

budgetary allocations, and prioritise some areas (e.g. training) over others (e.g. vehicle purchases). Alternative means of raising revenue, such as the private hire of police services by businesses such as banks are in place but these are potentially problematic (e.g. if conflicts of interest arise) (Lance Phoday, interview, 2011).

The IG continues to be appointed by the President (although there is now wide consultation during this process) and supervised by the Minister of Internal Affairs; the Police Council is chaired by the Vice-President; and the government controls the purse strings. The set-up continues to provide the facility for a corrupt political party, or individuals with oversight responsibilities, to levy undue influence over the keeper of the SLP's highest office.

With the change of government (from SLPP to APC), there was some worry that the police's newly-acquired independence would be eroded, and when they came in, some senior politicians tried to throw their weight around. But key ministers such as the former Minister of Internal Affairs, Dauda Kamara were instrumental (although ultimately unsuccessful) in trying to create an independent authority to supervise the police, outside of government machinery. Although not yet a reality, the proposal remains under review. However, it remains a contentious issue, not just in or for Sierra Leone, but also in other countries. After all, control over the use of force remains a key sovereign function of the state. What is the wisdom then of putting the police under the supervision of an independent authority?

In that case, it may be enough to ensure that the appropriate checks and balances remain in place. So for instance, while the appointment of the IG and their deputy are still political appointments, which may disfavour more experienced and capable AIGs who are not preferred by politicians, the appointments are now made after wide-ranging consultations such that there is no longer scope for arbitrary appointments within the democratic system. Nevertheless, a recent constitutional review recommended that the appointment of the IG should be an independent from government.

One problematic aspect of the way the reform in Sierra Leone took place is that it focused on the police, largely in isolation – so it was only recently for instance that prison reform was undertaken. The JSDP has gone a long way in redressing this but the time lag has been problematic for the successful performance of the police.

A new IG took over in August 2010, and perhaps the time has come for the police to review, nearly ten years later, the impact and relevance of the restructuring. For instance, (some officers feel) the institution would benefit from reintroducing one rank within the junior ranking structure, and another in the senior ranking structure, to manage people's expectations.

8 Conclusions
This article has tried to tell a story about organisational change, from the perspectives of senior Sierra Leonean officers who were in the middle of efforts to see the change through, and who today have the responsibility of maintaining it.

They face significant challenges, however. Perception surveys (e.g. Vincent 2008) have shown that while the public does think the police force has improved, it is still widely considered a corrupt institution. As much as the restructuring has been embraced, there are still officers who have refused to change. At the same time, some members of the public are still on the fence – not everybody appreciates the police (sometimes, the police feel, no matter what they do!). As with any war, there is always the aftermath to contend with; high rates of unemployment, particularly among young people, means high crime rates to deal with, community conflicts and so on. Furthermore, detractors worry that not enough has changed, and in fact the ground that has been won is already being eroded. With ever-decreasing sources of funding will progress be completely erased?

Senior Police Officers assert that they are working hard to ensure that they provide the necessary services, and will continue to do so, as long as essential funding is forthcoming. The government's role is therefore vital. Public security needs to be a priority of the government. While it is understandable that the government is constrained, security provision must not be compromised. A positive note however, is that lack of funds notwithstanding, the government's commitment to the process has been maintained.

Despite the change in the governing party there is official commitment to maintaining the police's operational independence (although there is evidence that this is eroding somewhat). The upcoming (2012) elections will prove an important test of police independence.

Finally, the Sierra Leone experience shows the need for reform to be a society-wide endeavour. This is most apparent with regard to one of the police's most persistent problems: corruption.

Notes

1   The article was written by Assistant Inspector General (AIG) Chris Charley and Freida M'Cormack. Freida also interviewed Chris Charley, AIGs Kadi Fakondo and Elizabeth Turay, and Lance Phoday, head of the SLP's Corporate Services over a period of five weeks in December 2010 and January 2011 in Sierra Leone. The information provided in the interviews was verified by/referenced using previous research on police reform in Sierra Leone. (Interview dates: Charley, 20 December 2010 and 6 January 2011; Fakondo, 10 January 2011; Turay, 6 January 2011; Phoday, 8 January 2011).
2   The Sierra Leone Civil War began in 1991, when a rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) invaded the country from neighbouring Liberia. Although the RUF claimed they were fighting to free Sierra Leoneans from the ills of the Sierra Leone government, the atrocities they committed belied their claims. In the face of the army's inability to defend the country, other parties, including community defence groups and regional peacekeepers were drawn into the war. After numerous failed peace agreements, two military coups, a palace coup and a transition to democratic governance, the war finally ended in 2002.
3   Common law systems trace their history to England, while civil law systems trace their history to Roman law and the French Napoleonic code. Common law systems place great weight on court decisions and common law courts have the authority to make law where no legislative statute exists. By contrast, in civil law jurisdictions, courts lack authority to act where there is no statute, and judicial precedent is given less interpretive weight.
4   An area in Freetown.

Corruption is society-wide – one could almost label it a cultural problem, pervading homes, families, churches, schools, etc. and tackling it requires a holistic approach. In 2008, the government adopted an official national policy of 'Attitudinal Change', which includes the notion that the public must accept and address the role it plays in facilitating corruption, including among the police. It also reinforces the notion that improved policing in Sierra Leone must be a community effort.

5   Reform would have been impossible without the sustained provision of funds by international donors, mainly through the Sierra Leone Security Sector Reform Programme (SILSEP, 1999–2008) and the Justice Sector Development Programme (JSDP, 2004–2009). Most of this has been from DFID, channelled through the CPDTF but support has also been received from other bilateral donors, the UN ECOWAS. In addition to the police, under SILSEP, support was also provided to the Office of National Security, the Central Intelligence and Security Unit, the Ministries of Defence and Internal Affairs and a range of institutions with an interest in accountability and enhanced service delivery across the security sector (parliament, civil society, media and academia) (Biesheuvel *et al.* 2007). The JSDP additionally provided support to the justice sector.
6   Kabbah similarly appointed Nigerian ECOMOG Commander Maxwell Kobe as his Chief of Defence Staff. After Kobe died under mysterious circumstances, a street in the nation's third city Kenema (where ECOMOG helped prevent the RUF from taking over) was named after him, and his memory kept alive through popular song and remembered gratitude.
7   In May 2000, RUF soldiers captured 500 UN peacekeepers, who were part of the provisions of the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement. The situation that followed threatened to reignite the conflict and British troops promptly arrived to evacuate their own and other foreign nationals, but also engaged and subdued rebel elements. An 800-strong contingent remained to support the UN peacekeepers and support the reconstitution of the Sierra Leone Army.
8   The concept of neopatrimonialism is derived from Weber's definition of patrimonialism,

whereby authority is ascribed to a person rather than an office-holder, who is firmly anchored in a social and political order, in a system held together by loyalty or kinship ties rather than hierarchical administrative grades and functions (Clapham 1985).

9 This incuded Kandeh Bangura, the Deputy IG who had bravely safeguarded police interests during the AFRC regime: although reform-minded, and highly regarded by SLP officers, he still belonged to the old school and fearing being retired by Biddle, became more concerned with personal survival than spearheading reforms.

10 The main elements of Community Policing include: policing directed by community engagement; devolution of responsibilities to officers on the ground; partnership with other agencies and local authorities in securing the public's interest and resolving problems; a proactive (rather than reactive) approach to problem solving; and an orientation towards maintaining peace rather than enforcing the law (Mackenzie and Henry 2009).

11 During the war, in the face of the double threat from both the RUF and rogue elements of the Sierra Leone Army, many communities mobilised their own civil militias (mostly derived from traditional hunting societies). Although now collectively known as Kamajors, the actual term is a specific reference to the militias that formed in the south and the east of the country, mostly in Bo District. They successfully repelled the RUF from Bo, Sierra Leone's second city, and subsequently set themselves up as police, judge and jury, arresting, imprisoning and even executing suspected criminals.

12 The Bondo Society in Sierra Leone is widely revered. A girl is initiated into the Bondo society through seclusion in the Bondo 'Bush', by way of a female circumcision and other rites of passage into womanhood. It is a common practice throughout Sierra Leone. It is also a highly political issue, demonstrated by the fact that despite international campaigns and pressure from rights activists, politicians have been reluctant to oppose, and in fact have continued to endorse the practice, for fear of losing the support of its powerful champions (Afrol 2002).

13 The chief female initiator, a very powerful figure in traditional society.

14 She was likely motivated by the fact that Bondo is a lucrative business; much is spent on the associated celebrations and Sowies are paid handsomely for their services.

15 Training and support was sponsored by the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), the Civilian Police, the Department for International Development (DFID), the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, the IRC, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and other agencies.

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