

Who Do People Turn to for Policing in Sierra Leone?

Bruce Baker

Since independence, efforts have been made by African states to establish Western models of policing and security. That this system has failed to deliver crime prevention and crime investigation for most Africans is largely because the resource assumptions implicit in the model are beyond the means of African countries. In the case of Sierra Leone, the incompetent and corrupt one-party rule was challenged in 1991 by a rebellion led by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). In the course of the ensuing brutal 10-year civil war, there was both a military coup against the unelected government in 1992 and, after a lull when President Kabbah was elected, against that government too in 1997. The leaders of the second coup invited the RUF to join the junta, but after military intervention by Nigerian-led West African troops, President Kabbah was restored to power in 1998. Even so the country continued to be racked by war until late 2001. A 17 300-strong UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), the world's largest peacekeeping mission, has maintained the peace, but UNAMSIL is due to be fully withdrawn by early 2006 (for recent analysis of war see, Richards 2003).

Inevitably the war seriously undermined the state's ability to function or to maintain the rule of law. The Sierra Leone Police (SLP), who had experienced long years of neglect under one-party rule, were decimated during the civil war. As a result of the inevitable gaps in the provision of state policing, other policing agencies have arisen, offering localised protection of various levels of legality, effectiveness, availability, cost, methods and services. Each in their own way seeks to maintain their own version of communal order, security and peace. Since these policing agencies frequently overlap in their sphere of influence, Sierra Leoneans are confronted with a choice of policing agencies. The extended family may protect the home, but it may be the youth that sorts out the fight at the village bar, the customary chief that settles the inheritance dispute, the community peace monitors that address war looting, the vendors' committee that mediates a settlement over debt repayment by another market trader, the taxi drivers' association attendant that handles the taxi park disturbance, the commercial security guard that secures the entrance to the city bank, the mine monitors that check the legality of the diamond dealers' trading and the SLP that respond to the traffic fatality. Policing, as it is experienced in Sierra Leone, therefore, is multi-choice policing.

Elsewhere I have suggested a typology to understand the variety of policing that exists in Africa (Baker 2004a). Yet the significance of this fragmented policing has not always been fully appreciated. Many have assumed that it is part of a global trend of increasing diversification of policing away from the state. Bayley and Shearing (2001) argue that there has been a “worldwide” restructuring of policing that they term “multilateralisation”. “A host of non-governmental groups have assumed responsibility for their own protection, and a host of non-governmental agencies have undertaken to provide security services”. Loader (2000:328) notes that “across the developed and the developing world there is a broad and diverse network of policing that not only works through government but, above, below and beyond government”. Similarly, Johnston (2001:965) observes that the broad trend is that “citizens, rather than being the passive consumers of police services, engage in a variety of productive security activities”. Though this may be a common pattern, it does not capture the nuances of every situation. Research in Uganda, for instance, has shown that although increasing diversification there is the reality, for reasons of history it is not a clear-cut diversification away from the state. The new agencies, in Uganda at least, are not predominantly non-state formal and informal agencies. Instead, much of the diversification taking place is still within the boundaries of state initiation or at least state influence and approval (Baker 2004b, 2004d, 2005).¹

An assumption, which I want to address more specifically in this article, is that citizens in developing countries would sooner have policing provided by the state police and only accept non-state policing reluctantly. Goldsmith (2003:9) claims that “the consistent finding of public surveys in recent years” is of “a general desire to see more police on the streets”, which he equates with their identification of state policing with improved security. He goes on to speak of “public appreciation of the limitations of the alternatives” to state police and of “a strong grassroots demand for better state-provided security, a demand that cannot and will not be satisfied by non-state providers” (*ibid*). This is not the experience in Sierra Leone today.

This account records the various policing agencies on offer and how Sierra Leonean men and women in urban and rural settings evaluate them. It is based on research undertaken between February and March 2005.² It addresses the questions as to who are responsible for authorising and delivering policing; what the providers offer and how they relate to one another; and how the public perceives each in terms of competence, accessibility and accountability. It also seeks to consider the implications for the government of Sierra Leone. The article will examine three types of police structure: those operated by the Sierra Leone state; private and community structures that have state approval; and those that are unauthorised by the state. The policing structures to be examined and their key features are summarised in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Current Policing Structures in Sierra Leone

Policing body	Authoriser	Powers	Key Function	Links With Other Policing Bodies	Funding
State structures					
Sierra Leone Police (SLP)	Central Government	Standard Police powers	Serious crime	Work with Partnership Boards	State
Mine Monitors, Beach Police, Traffic Wardens	Ministry of Mines; Tourist Board; Traffic Authority	Reduced police powers	Supervision of mining and Freetown beaches and traffic	Work with SLP	State
State - approved					
Police Local Partnership Boards	Sierra Leone Police	Citizen	Provide Intelligence to Police	Work with SLP	Volunteers
Work-based Associations	Elected leaders of association	Citizen	Security of work place	Minimal contact with SLP	Members' contributions
Customary Structures	Chiefdoms	Judicial posers in civil matters	Civil and customary arbitration	Minimal contact with SLP	Chiefdoms and State
Commercial security	Private companies	Licensed by Police	Guarding	Joint patrols with armed police in high-risk situations	Commercial
Peace monitors	Community Groups	Citizen	Civil arbitration	Minimal contact with Police	Volunteers
Unauthorised					
Youth Groups	Youth Groups	Citizen	Guarding and rapid response	Minimal contact with SLP	Volunteers
Mob 'justice'			Assaults on alleged criminals	None	

Contemporary Crime and Insecurity

Opinion about crime rates is divided in Sierra Leone among the public, police, commercial security managers and journalists. Nor are the conflicting views of high and low rates resolved by the Annual Crime Report published by the SLP (2005). Inevitably there are problems of under-reporting to the SLP because of lack of access, alternative resolution systems, embarrassment, fear of the SLP and desire for speedy justice. But in addition, there is the problem, admitted by the report, that: "most police officers in the provincial setting have yet to grasp the importance of crime statistics. Some crime officers do not send accurate crime figures" to police headquarters (SLP 2005). The under-reporting is particularly evident in sexual offences and domestic violence. Reports from NGOs suggest that the incidence of these is very high (for example, Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) field officers' reports), yet reports to the SLP nationwide for the whole of 2004 were only 800 for sexual offences and 740 for domestic violence. Likewise, loitering with intent (usually prostitution offences) were only 345, despite widespread evidence of large activity in this area. Unlawful possession of diamonds at 13 cases and of cannabis at 244 suggest that these offences too are scarcely being policed.

In the areas of assault, wounding with intent, and robbery there is much greater likelihood of reporting being commensurate with experience. There were 19 468 cases of assault for 2004 and 4 183 cases of wounding with intent. This is still a low figure for a population of 4.9 million. Robbery cases number 331 and robbery with violence, which is regularly splashed across the newspapers as if it were a nightly occurrence in Freetown, is only 91 nationwide. Meek (2003) is certainly right to assert that these are "very low rates of firearm-related crime" and few of the SLP or public he interviewed could recount such an incident in the previous few months. Yet, considering that a crime perception survey revealed that in urban populations in Sierra Leone only 42 per cent felt safe in their community, it is clear that the fear of crime is disproportionate to its incidence (SLP 2004).

Contrary to what might be expected, the war that disrupted social control mechanisms and left armed groups available for criminal activities does not appear to have caused a sudden growth in the crime rate.³ The top four crimes of assault, larceny, fraudulent conversion and wounding with intent have scarcely changed since the 2002 Crime Survey. Nor has robbery risen. Where there have been steep rises, such as in child abuse, unlawful carnal knowledge and domestic violence, this is almost certainly the result of sensitisation programmes amongst the public and SLP and hence the greater willingness to report such cases.⁴

The formal justice system is still very limited in its ability to handle cases. Courts operate only in the main towns of Freetown, Bo, Kenema, Port Loko and Makeni, and there are only 15 presiding magistrates and 18 judges. The paucity of court personnel, court records and legal reference materials, plus the inadequacy of the evidence provided by the SLP, contribute to the serious problems of lengthy

delays of cases and imprisonment of suspects without formal charge. Sierra Leone's official legal system has only limited practical relevance for most people, not only because of its remoteness and slowness, but because few can afford lawyers.⁵ Many defendants go entirely without representation and, knowing little about their rights, are seriously disadvantaged.

Magistrates themselves appear to be mixed in their effectiveness. Reports of CGG field officers detail widespread concerns. For example: "the people claim to have lost confidence in the magistrate's court due to its corrupt ways of administering justice"; "it is reported that the magistrate is in the habit of perpetually absenting himself from court sittings".⁶

In this context of moderate crime rates but a faltering formal court system, people must weigh their options as to the best police agency for their situation. They can choose from agencies authorised by the state, elected work committees, chiefdoms, commercial companies, community groups, youth or their own family.

The Sierra Leone Police

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission describes the SLP before the war as "incompetent", "corrupt", "a ready tool for the perpetuation of state terror against political opponents", and as engaged in "extortion of money" and "the violation of basic human rights. All these factors served to widen the gulf between the public and the police" (Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Provisional Report 2004,3a:77). Throughout one-party rule and the civil war, the SLP was an instrument of state oppression, especially the paramilitary Special Security Division. Meek (2003:1) characterises the force's history as "a litany of oppressive policing, nepotism and corruption" making them "a ready target for the [rebel] RUF". Nor was it just corruption. "With corruption and the appointment of friends and colleagues came the decline of the service – skills were not sought after and officers were illiterate" (Biddle 2000:1). This, together with their loyalty to the elected Kabbah government, resulted in their being targeted in the rebel attack on Freetown in 1999 when more than 300 SLP officers were killed. During the 10-year war approximately 900 SLP officers were killed, and a considerable number suffered amputation. As a result, the size of the SLP was reduced from 9317 to 6600 (Malan, Rakate, McIntyre 2002:65). Though the force, as it existed after the war, was 'contaminated' by past events and conduct, it was decided not to disband it but to totally restructure it and to retrain the executive management team. The main body of the SLP is comprised, unusually for Africa, of unarmed general duty officers, who are supported by specialist branches such as the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Traffic Police, and Family Support Unit. Also part of the SLP is the large Operational Support Division (OSD). The 2 500-strong armed element (though some 1000 are support staff) is kept from general duties. In addition to providing mobile armed support to the general duty officers, the OSD is responsible for riot control, VIP protection, providing

static guards for government facilities, and working with major commercial security companies when engaged in high risk areas or at diamond mines. Though taking a large proportion of the force's resources, the OSD justify their size in terms of a perceived high security threat and persistent and nationwide armed robbery. There seems little evidence to support this.

The present strength of the whole force is 8000, although this includes at least 2000 support staff. The SLP has received substantial donor support, including more than £20 million from the UK in the last five years (with £17m more earmarked for the next five years). The focus of the support has been on training senior personnel in strategic and operational planning, through the Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project (CCSSP) and the UN CivPol programme. In addition, police stations and barracks are slowly being refurbished following war damage. Donors have also supplied radios, weapons, uniforms and up to 800 vehicles, although maintaining the latter is beyond current resources to sustain. Local unit commanders reported severe lack of fuel, and two spoke of accommodation as a major problem.⁸

The biggest impact on the reform process since the war has been on the relationship between the public and the police. Problems still exist in the public mind as regards corruption. The practice continues of charging complainants fees for papers and pens before obtaining statements from them; and 81 per cent still claimed that the Traffic Police demanded money from drivers (SLP 2004). And there are still issues of police response: it has to be a matter of concern that in Freetown, whereas a newspaper editor, a successful businessman and the general secretary of a large woman's movement felt that the SLP responded quickly, fishermen, market traders, kiosk owners and youth said they were slow or did not respond at all. The use of excessive violence against political dissent is also unpopular.⁹ On the other hand, it has to be remembered that until relatively recently the SLP were still regarded with suspicion and fear. Today, whatever the other criticisms, the almost universal response is that the SLP are more approachable. Police may not always be close at hand to many citizens, but generally people would not hesitate to call upon them if there were something that needed their assistance. True, there are those who say it is "better to take hurt" than to go to the SLP, but many more spoke like the youth leader: "Before the war we were afraid of the Police. [Now] we should play our role with the Police as partners".¹⁰ In 2004 the SLP commissioned a small public perception survey.¹¹ Being carried out in four urban areas (Freetown, Makeni, Bo, Kenema) it gives a snapshot of urban perceptions. Importantly only 15 per cent felt that there had been "no improvement" in SLP behaviour, whilst 46 per cent thought there had been a "great improvement in police attitude", particularly as regards human rights and "rudeness".

With Sierra Leone's population of 4.9 million people, the SLP can provide an operational police/civilian ratio of only about 1.3 per thousand citizens. This cannot provide the crime prevention and crime investigation service that the public want.

But the issue is not just of people wanting 'more police on the street'. Though it may be assuring to them that the SLP are approachable if required, there is little evidence that they have confidence in their willingness to protect their lives and property or the skills to investigate crimes. Most interviewed dismissed as futile the idea of reporting such incidents to the SLP. Even as the SLP sought funds to establish more posts in areas where they had no presence, people in those very areas were saying that they did not want one and had no need of one, since they had made alternative arrangements for their own protection.¹² It is the appreciation of the limitations of the state police, not of their alternatives, that is the reality in Sierra Leone.

Other State Policing

In addition to the 6000 operational SLP, other government ministries and parastatals have also created policing agencies, but they scarcely have any impact on the public

Mines Monitoring Officers

To combat illicit diamond mining and smuggling, the Ministry of Mineral Resources has 100 Mines Monitoring Officers (MMOs), 60 of whom are in Kono district. Their task is to check licences, inspect monthly sales of diamond dealers, and deter smuggling. With only 16 motorbikes for the Kono district, little training and low salary,¹³ they are not a significant policing agency. One diamond dealer in Kono said that their poor training and pay put them at the mercy of the dealers: "If I want to smuggle it is easy to bribe a man on \$50 per month."¹⁴ Miners and diggers interviewed said they never saw them and local youth dismissed them as "bribed" .

Certainly the policing of the diamond mining and certification process is not thorough. A monthly report is sent to the Ministry of Mineral Resources, based on inspections of the diamond dealer's records of the values and caratage of each diamond sold. However, "historically it is standard industry practice to only record a small percentage of goods bought, mostly lower value diamonds" (Global Witness 2001). Another report is made for sales in Freetown. It is not clear what facilities there are to analyse the data nor what happens to the information when it arrives at the Ministry. Indeed "there appears to be very little coordination between the Ministry of Mineral Resources and the MMOs" (Global Witness 2001).

Beach Wardens

The National Tourist Board has long operated a beach warden scheme at the popular Lumley beach, Freetown. Ten uniformed wardens on two day-time shifts seek to provide some security from theft and to offer advice to users. But they have had no training and carry only a radio. Given that the beach is quiet during

the day, except at holidays and the weekend, and that the main disturbances occur at night when large crowds frequent the bars, the effectiveness of this force has to be questioned.

Traffic Wardens

The Road Transport Authority has created a corps of 34 traffic wardens for Freetown. The wardens control and regulate road traffic and are also empowered to issue tickets to enforce traffic laws. The wardens enjoy the same powers as the SLP in the control and regulation of traffic, but are able to exercise their functions only when in uniform.

The most striking fact about these minor state policing agencies is the lack of co-ordination between them and the SLP that inevitably follows from the different ministerial responsibilities. That their responsibilities cover (lucrative) areas that the SLP could manage does not endear them to all police officers.

State-Approved Policing

Given the limitations of size and skills of state police forces across Africa, governments have had to consider how citizens can be mobilised in an acceptable way to play a role in keeping law and order and in implementing anti-crime strategies. There is considerable potential in mobilising communal self-interest to join in the effort, even if the strategy will inevitably see the emergence of some undesirable elements. Four types of non-state policing have emerged in Sierra Leone: one initiated by the SLP themselves; those initiated by community organisations; those initiated by customary structures; and those initiated by formal and informal commercial interests.

Initiated by the SLP: Local Policing Partnership Boards

The Partnership Boards were initiated by the SLP when they embraced the concept of 'Local-Needs Policing' after the war. They are chaired by civilians and include representatives of the significant groups and interests in the locality. The Inspector General of Police sees these groups as "the key to success in the future" for the control of crime.¹⁵ In Makeni, Bo and Koidu there were complaints that the Partnership Boards were not effective and were failing to meet regularly. On the other hand, one Freetown Partnership Board has already provided information that has led to the arrest of eight 'hard core' criminals and the seizure of their weapons and has begun to map 'ghettoes' (drug centres) with a view to the SLP using the information to make arrests and knock down the premises. Officially the prime aim of the Boards is to give local communities a say in how they want to be policed. Yet when 26 people attended a Partnership Board one Saturday morning to consider the Community Action Plan, they were handed a printed copy of the plan drawn up by the SLP beforehand. The Board was simply required to confirm it.¹⁶ The co-operation of the public in these newly formed

Boards does point to a desire to see better state-provided policing, but if the SLP continue to exclude local voices from anything other than intelligence gathering and fail to maintain the regular meetings, this could merely be a temporary phenomenon.

Initiated by Informal Commercial Interests: Work-Based Policing Associations

Many of the economic activities in Sierra Leone's towns have an association that disciplines and protects members. All town markets have a committee that is recognised by the town council. They act to control the conduct of vendors and customers. Low-level misconduct, such as smoking cannabis, spitting and abusive language can result in a fine. More serious issues of debt and fighting are brought to mediation. If they cannot be resolved by the market committee it may lead to the suspension of the trader for weeks or months in addition to the fine. The SLP are largely absent from the markets and the vendors prefer it that way. They regard going to the SLP or local councillors as 'a waste of time' – either because they will not act or they release the thieves taken to them very quickly (a sign to many of collusion). Indeed, one chairlady of a large Freetown market said that she "abhorred" their presence at the market, since they would appear only if they were intent on extorting money. The overwhelming view was that traders were on their own as regards protection from and punishment of crime. "Discipline is done by the market women [rather than the SLP] because we know their problems and know native customary law," said a Freetown market women's leader. Pickpocketing and petty theft were hard to prevent, but if a thief was caught he was usually beaten on the spot.¹⁷

The Motor Drivers' and General Transport Workers' Union, with a membership of about 5000, claim to control many of the commercial vehicle and minibus parking areas in the main towns. They claim various levels of activity. In Freetown they check owners' particulars, including driving licence and insurance, and use car park attendants to oversee loading and protect passengers. In Waterloo members take it in turn to be attendants. They have distinctive bibs and deal with problems relating to drivers, passengers and pickpockets. They issue fines, ban drivers, and exclude undesirable persons. In Bo the drivers claim responsibility for all vehicles in the town and take offenders to the SLP. In Makeni the drivers alleged that dangerous driving by members was punished severely: "We give them lashes".¹⁸ The Bo Bike Rental Association, in addition to running motorbike transport in Bo and enforcing rules concerning speeding, reckless driving, carrying more than one passenger, and carrying a woman with child, also has a Task Force. This patrols at night and investigates and resolves disputes.¹⁹

There is no evidence that these work-based policing associations are accepted only reluctantly or seen as of limited use. On the contrary, the demand for better security is being satisfied by non-state providers.

Initiated by Formal Commercial Interests: Commercial Security Groups

The principal work of commercial companies is to provide unarmed guards for commercial premises, international organisations, NGOs and residential customers. The absence of weapons is due to the UN arms embargo. At the start of the war there were only two companies operating, but since the war there has been a rapid expansion, because of the prevailing sense of increasing crime, the weakness of the SLP, and the presence of many international NGOs requiring security for their staff. There are now about 30 licenced companies, most of which are based in Freetown.²⁰ Of the 20 more significant companies, the largest are Mount Everest (1700 employees), Pentagon (900) and Hughes Security (800). There are also international companies such as Group4Falck and SecuricorGray, which together employ about 1000 guards, primarily in Freetown and the large mines (Abrahamsen and Williams 2004:6).

At diamond mines, banks and some diplomatic missions, and for some rapid response teams, commercial operators work alongside the OSD to provide a mix of armed and unarmed guards, with security companies paying a premium to the individual OSD officers above the standard wages. The irony does not go unnoticed that government revenue is spent sending SLP personnel to guard commercial rather than citizen interests.

Most companies employ ex-soldiers or retired police with screening of recruits for criminal records by the CID. The screening does not, however, cover rebel background, for which there has been national forgiveness. For all they know, some companies may be employing ex-rebels, which they consider an unsatisfactory situation.²¹ Training is offered to the recruits only by the larger companies. It includes human rights training at the request of the UN for its own contracts. Human rights, however, are not normally a priority. As one operations manager of a large firm insisted, human rights should be considered only *after* the suspect has been 'made' to tell the truth!

Most international organisations, larger commercial businesses, NGOs and the wealthier residential customers do not have confidence in the SLP to provide them with protection from crime and appear much more satisfied with the commercial alternative.

Initiated by Customary Structures

Almost everywhere in Sierra Leone, anti-social behaviour and its resolution are regulated by chiefs. They either advise people to go to the SLP and state courts if it is a criminal matter, or using customary law, handle civil and customary matters within their own local courts. The customary courts are particularly focused on cases involving family law, debt repayment, inheritance, and land tenure. This system was the only legal form available before or during the war. Since the war, however, there have been difficulties in re-establishing them, with many court

houses yet to be reconstructed and some courts sitting only “once in a while”. Many chiefs have also had their authority undermined because of their failure to protect the people, and some lost their mystique when they were seen being tortured and killed by the rebels or queuing with the ordinary people for food hand-outs.

Unfortunately, customary law is often discriminatory, particularly against women. The CGG regularly report cases of serious beatings of wives for which chiefs’ courts handed out sentences of small fines or even took no action at all. The local courts also frequently abuse their powers by illegally detaining persons, charging excessively high fines for minor offences, and adjudicating criminal cases (in Freetown headmen cannot adjudicate civil cases either).

The Native Authority Police are a shadow of their former selves. Their number per chiefdom ranges from two to 25²³ but they now face problems of recruiting because of the lack of pay and few benefits available. Kane *et al* (2002:16) report that

the extent to which these police are organized, equipped or even active varies considerably. So too do their roles (and presumably their understanding of their roles). Some are basically court messengers. Others play a role in community safety and security. They play an important policing role in rural areas where in many cases they are the primary policing body.

This research found that their main job was to collect market dues and local tax. They have no uniforms, no weapons, and only minimal training by the district office of the Native Authority. Their justification for their continuing role is that “customary laws will always need policing”.

Having played the major role in crime prevention and protection for most people in Sierra Leone for more than a century, there is indeed a danger that this alternative policing structure may fail in the near future because of its evident limitations. What the next section shows, however, is that it may not necessarily be to the SLP that the people will turn to take the place of the Native Authorities, but to alternative community-based organisations.

Initiated by the Community: Peace Monitors

Some communities in the Bo, Pujehun and Sulima areas in the south have established mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Bo Peace and Reconciliation Movement (BPRM) is a coalition of 11 community groups working on peacebuilding, reconciliation and crime prevention in the Bo district. Its 20 local Peace Monitors have resolved many conflicts such as family matters, fighting, land cases and leadership issues, including some longstanding disputes (they handled 255 cases in 2004). Their work has reduced community conflict and litigation in the local courts, and helped many ex-combatants reintegrate into the

communities. BPRM's success has earned it the recognition of the provincial administration in Bo.²⁴

Further south, the Soro Gbema chiefdom, in Pujehun District, had a number of local problems including disputes caused by the death of a paramount chief, lack of civil authority, and the usurpation of this authority by Civil Defence Force (CDF) commanders. With help from the only community-based organisation working in the chiefdom (the Sulima Fishing Community Development Project) the community created a peace-monitoring system that promotes peacebuilding, development and access to justice. Each section of the chiefdom was provided with a Peace Monitor for early intervention in conflicts. The community also established grievance committees. Local conflicts are brought to these committees for arbitration or mediation. The 12 Peace Monitors (mainly respected Koranic teachers) work for a small stipend 10 days every month and cover 10 to 15 villages each.

When there are local grievances over property ownership, looting and unlawful claiming of property, drug abuse and trafficking, and disregard of traditions and customs, the people call the Peace Monitors in preference to court action. Hence one of the negative impacts of this alternative policing is that the district administration has been unable to generate revenue, so there is a growing official resentment. When the District Officer of Pujehun District sought to reinstitute collection of local taxes and to re-establish the Native Authority court, the people refused to pay the taxes and rejected the reinstatement of the court because they saw it as ineffective. A summons fee of 10 000 Leones (£2) is required by Native Authority courts, but the people prefer the free assistance of Peace Monitors to settle their conflicts and differences (Massaquoi 1999).

The Peace Monitors have been introduced in only a few places in Sierra Leone, but their potential to expand is obvious. Here is a policing system that is effective, accessible and cheap. Few will imagine that an enlarged SLP would necessarily provide them with such a service. For the time being, at least, there is no evidence that the public appreciates this alternative as very limited and would prefer it to be replaced by a state provider.

Unauthorised Policing

Youth Groups

Many young men are unemployed and this, together with their history in the war as combatants, makes people wary of them and quick to label them as criminals at worst or untrustworthy at best.²⁵ The more violent certainly perpetuate mob justice or have continued their combatant role in Liberia.²⁶ However, the vast majority of young people perceive themselves as "guardians of security". Indeed, though they recognise that "youth are still struggling to gain acceptance" from the local communities, they assert that "this is no longer a time of violence, though not every youth has got that understanding."²⁷ Far from being criminal,

they argue that “security is in our hands”.²⁸ And in villages and poor townships it was found that this has been turned into a reality. In the absence of the SLP and sometimes with the failure of the customary structures to re-establish themselves after the war, there is a clear security gap and it is the youth that more often than not are filling it. It was they who initiated the Bo Peace Monitors and the Bo Bike Rental Association Task Force.

In the town of Yengema, in Kono, the youth stay alert at night and respond to fights and other problems. They are particularly opposed to drugs: “We harass anybody who brings drugs. We arrest them, destroy drugs and give them a beating.” In their view the drug problem “is solved; no more drugs”.²⁹ The town chief concurred that the area was “depending on youths to take care of us at night”, though he added that “youths are not always reliable”.³⁰ Similarly, in the nearby village of Tombodou, the chief spoke of youth controlling security: “they see [that] things go on normally” and fill in for the inactive Chiefdom Police and absent SLP.³¹ And according to the Tombodou women’s leader, they “ensure local policing where SLP don’t go. They make arrest and take them to the SLP.”³² In Makeni I saw youths dealing at night with a fight between two girls, one of whom had broken a bottle over the head of the other. Youths also frequently provide security for small diamond companies. In the alluvial mining area of Gbense chiefdom, a group of 12 youths secured Kariba Kono Ltd’s holding on behalf of the elders, who had been promised development projects by the company. Though currently unpaid, the youth had been promised employment when mining began.³³

In the town of Koidu in Kono, the Movement of Concerned Kono Youth (MOCKY) also claimed to deal with youth problems and to settle small cases. In the past they have been accused of using violence. In particular, it is said that they have mobilised youth to resist the influx of fortune seekers in the alluvial diamond-mining sector, sometimes collaborating with local police units and the CDF (Reno 2004). Other reports say that MOCKY and former CDF have held informal courts to settle disputes among area residents not satisfied with the results of the formal judicial system (State Department Country Report 2003). There is no evidence of this currently. Whatever the past actions, the aims of MOCKY’s 5000 members now seem focused on advocacy (for “just mining”), local development, the protection of the interests of youth and resolving youth problems. In this role it has a seat on the local Police Partnership Board (“though it is not very effective” in their view).³⁴

In parts of Freetown youth groups have shown a serious concern for crime prevention and security provision. A considerable number of the participants in the Kissi Police Partnership Board were local youth, and elsewhere the youth of Firestone Cultural and Community Organisation run sensitisation programmes on drugs and for prostitutes.³⁵ Security provision has also emerged in some of the poorest settlements. By the port, in Krootown, Camp Divas Youth maintain a measure of order, especially among the youth. They fine cases of fighting and

abusive language and flog those who fail to pay the fine. Thieves, they say, they take to the SLP.³⁶ A local tribal headman concurred that youth often intervened to stop fighting when the SLP failed to respond, though he also acknowledged that they stoned a police station when a man they wanted was taken there.³⁷ And outside a police divisional headquarters I watched 40 youth demonstrating loudly for compensation for a cow they had 'arrested' wandering down the main road. Inside the station the Local Unit Commander negotiated with the youth and the cow owner until a financial settlement was reached and the crowd left in jubilation.

The wariness noted above in Kono district and in Freetown by the older population regarding youth was found also in Bombali District in the north. A paramount chief in Sebora chiefdom feared that if they were given a role in security there would be a return to political militias and the youth would "make a living out of it".³⁸ And a local Police Commander felt that the Neighbourhood Watch was not effective locally because the youth representatives on it were 'criminals'.³⁹ Here then is some indication that certain sectors of the public accept youth policing only reluctantly because they are aware of its downside. Yet this unease has to be balanced by the almost universal village voices of Bombali. In the villages of Massesse, Malong and Makundu it was the youth alone who provided security. They were the ones who kept alert at night for trouble, so much so that neither the headmen nor youth wanted a police post, for they saw no need for one.⁴⁰ Where, then, a choice had to be made between youth policing or state policing, there is a divide.

Mobs

The more violent young men still, however, turn to mob violence. Often motivated by widespread distrust or misunderstanding of the justice system (especially police bail) and with dissatisfaction with state policing, mob 'justice' against alleged criminals is still widespread in Sierra Leone. Crowds of local people (mainly, though not exclusively, young males) engage in stonings, beatings, machete attacks, and burning alive. One town councillor reported that "where I live we give thieves a good hiding; we don't take them to the Police for we won't get the exhibit [the stolen property] back."

Militia

Sierra Leone's now defunct civilian militia, the CDF, were very active during the civil war, fighting along with the Sierra Leonean army. They nevertheless dealt harshly with the civilian population. Forced recruitment, looting, rape and executions of suspected RUF-sympathisers were common tactics of these militiamen. In areas controlled by them, children caught for alleged criminal activities were 'militarily' punished and others received severe beatings.

Reno (2004:8) has claimed that:

The CDF still exists as an organized group, despite a December 2002 agreement between the government and foreign donors to dismantle it. The CDF's offer to assist the Sierra Leone Army's efforts to stem incursions of Liberian fighters in 2003 and reports that it assisted insurgents in Liberia against Liberian President Charles Taylor suggest that it may have a greater capacity than the national army, at least in some parts of the country.

However, national intelligence agencies have concluded that they are not currently present in Sierra Leone. But with 3000 Karamajor having gone to Liberia to fight, they acknowledge that there is a threat of their imminent return.⁴¹

Conclusion

In Sierra Leone, as everywhere in Africa, there are a surprising number of policing agencies – non-state and state, offering citizens an array of choice for crime protection and crime investigation. Far from being the case that “pluralization” of security largely ignores the weakest members” of weak states (Goldsmith 2003:18), the evidence from Sierra Leone, as other African states, is that it provides almost all that the weakest members know of policing.

What is particularly striking in Sierra Leone is the abundant evidence that youth were actually providing local security in areas where the SLP are rarely seen. So often demonised as bearing a large part of the blame for Sierra Leone's woes, and feared as ‘the idle unemployed’, they, in practice, are committed to playing a role in security and development. Surely one way of reducing the likelihood of a return to rebellion is to utilise their energies for the good of the community and to tell them of their worth.

The fragmentation of policing calls for a policing policy quite distinct from the European pattern, where diversification is much less pronounced and resources for state policing are more considerable. To view plural policing as a potential solution to law and order issues does not mean a blanket acceptance of all providers. It is for elected government to construct a law and order policy that is based on incorporating all acceptable policing groups. Then the government has to define clearly the desired relationship between the various policing structures and set the parameters. The principle of a national strategy of law and order that integrates, regulates, mobilises, and empowers all those willing to preserve law and order in an acceptable manner is a fruitful place to start in improving the quality of security in Sierra Leone's communities. It could follow the concept adopted in South Africa regarding law and order issues as an entry-point to development projects: address law and order holistically as a development issue and not only as a policing issue. South Africa's Community Safety Forums bring together every local community organisation, international NGO and government agency

concerned with improving the quality of life, to develop a community safety plan (Schärf 2000). This, rather than marginalising non-state policing, seems a better approach for Sierra Leone to follow.

Short of an integrated policing policy, the non-state sector certainly needs some governmental attention. Though I have argued that there is little evidence of public appreciation of the limitations of the alternatives, that is not to say that there is no room for their improvement so that the public demand for policing *can* be “satisfied by non-state providers”. For the commercial security sector there is a need for an effective inspectorate (of guards, records and training) whose work could be complemented by encouraging a professional association that could act as a regulatory body maintaining professional standards and disciplinary lapses. To avoid unnecessary duplication of guard training or its neglect, the SLP could make relevant aspects of its own training available as a tailor-made course for the industry.

It is regrettable that so many self-employed people feel that they have to depend on themselves for security. But given this situation it is all the more important to regard the work-based associations as a valuable resource for policing. This could be enhanced if they were given simple training in the laws pertaining to their employment sector so that they understand what is legal and illegal, can educate and supervise their fellow members, and handle abuses appropriately. Uganda’s Crime Prevention Panels, for instance, have brought together groups such as taxi drivers, bar owners, teachers and the like, and have run short courses for them on the law and crime prevention (Baker 2004c, 2005).

To what degree the Native Authorities can and should regain their role in policing is a moot point. The courts and particularly the Native Authority Police are in poor shape in Sierra Leone, and in many places are in danger of becoming obsolete. In some quarters of government their demise might be welcomed. Unfortunately the state is not in a position to be able to fill the vacuum with the SLP. There is clearly a need for a thorough audit of traditional authorities’ current capacity and a review of their future role. Given their local knowledge and relative, if limited, skills, they constitute a resource that may be better to renew and assist rather than allow to become increasingly redundant. As Malawi has shown, there can be value in upgrading them rather than presiding over their demise (Wood 2000).

The key to reducing mob ‘justice’ is to address the underlying issues that precipitate the need for it. The main one is the perceived failure by legal institutions to tackle crime. For instance, criticism is made about the justice system’s inefficiency, inaction, lack of resources, and inadequate training, as well as corruption and complicity with criminals. There is also value in civic education, perhaps through the Police Partnership Boards. Apart from anything else, this keeps citizens, particularly ones with limited access to the media, abreast of legal developments, and encourages positive (anti-violent) citizenship. As with all non-state policing systems that operate outside the law, it is vital that those who support

mob 'justice' be strongly challenged and that those who undertake it be effectively prosecuted to show that the state and community will not tolerate it.

With changes such as these, a degree of effective policing could be provided for most of Sierra Leone's citizens without having to expand state policing, which seems a policy beyond the capacity of the Sierra Leone government for some time to come.

Notes

1. The legacy of the Ugandan revolution has included a deeply rooted local democracy and a fear of national insecurity recurring. The former has meant that the Resistance Council system established by the National Resistance Army during the course of the revolution to provide local law and order, has persisted (as Local Councils); the latter has led to a predilection for military solutions to insecurity and the militarisation of policing units. The extent of the provision of law and order by the Local Council system and the militarised units ensures that the state maintains a strong influence over most of the diversification of policing.
2. The research was funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (Award Reference: R000271293) and Coventry University.
3. However, armed robbery in Freetown is commonly attributed by the SLP and citizens to ex-RUF elements living just outside of the city.
4. Police commanders, youth group leaders and women's groups reported greater willingness of the SLP to treat sexual crimes and domestic violence seriously when these were reported to police stations. Interviews with Local Unit Commanders of the A, B, D, S and T Divisions; Chairlady of The Women's Organisations in Kono; Youth Leaders, Makeni, February 2005.
5. The Assistant Inspector General of Police for the Western Area, Mr Tamb Gbekie, says that those arrested have claimed that they were conducting robberies "because of their desperation to bribe lawyers so that their cases [pending from previous arrests] could be killed or endlessly adjourned in court" (*Standard Times*, January 31, 2005).
6. Interview with Koinadugu CGG field officer, January 2004, July 2004.
7. Interview with T.T. Kamara, Deputy Head, OSD, February 28, 2005.
8. Interviews with Local Unit Commanders of the A, B, D, S and T Divisions and CCSSP advisers, who spoke of fuel shortages and of equipment and vehicles that were out of service since parts were too expensive. See also "Fuel Shortage Handicaps Police Operations", *Concord Times*, Freetown, March 23, 2005. The SLP request for 2005 for 60 billion Leones (regarded as reasonable by CCSSP advisers) elicited a response of 21 billion from the government.
9. In March 2005 the OSD opened fire on demonstrating students, killing one and injuring two (still officially denied by the SLP). "Police Used Excessive Force During the Students' Demonstrations", *Standard Times*, Freetown, March 8, 2005.
10. Interview with youth leaders, Makeni, February 20, 2005.
11. The SLP issued 300 questionnaires to a non-random sample of informants; 287 were returned.
12. The villages of Massesse, Malong and Makundu in Bombali District had no police post, but when asked if they would like one it was universally declined. Interviews, February 21, 2005.
13. Interview with J. Sharkah, government mining engineer, February 9, 2005.
14. Interview with dealer, Koidu, February 9, 2005.
15. Interview with Brima Acha Kamara, Inspector General of Police, February 15, 2005.
16. B Division Partnership Board meeting, February 5, 2005. Interview with P.B. Williams, Chairman of the Board.
17. Interviews with market executives at Freetown Big Market; Garrison Market; Congo Town Market; Koidu Market; Makeni Market; Bo Market. February–March 2004.
18. Interviews in Freetown, Waterloo, Koidu and Makeni, February 2005.
19. Interview with Suliaman Silaah, Task Force Commander, March 3, 2005.

20. Though licences are required for commercial security companies, there is no effective inspection and no licence has been withdrawn.
21. Interviews with A. Sillah, managing director and administrative manager, Pentagon Security; J. Fofanah, general operations manager, Mount Everest Security Agency; E. Hudi Turay, manager, C&C Security; A. Tunkara, manager, Hughes Security, February 2005.
22. Interviews with Native Authority Police in Kamara chiefdom, February 8, 2005; P.C. Sebora, Paramount Chief, Sebora chiefdom, Bombali; Joe Kamegai-Macavoray, Paramount Chief, Tikonko chiefdom; Village Head, Massesse; R. Clarke, Headman, Krootown; A. Wright, Headman, Waterloo; Village Head, Malong; Kenneth Tommy, Town Chief, Yengema; Sahr Babonjo, Town Chief, Tombodou, February and March 2005.
23. In Kamara chiefdom there are nine Native Authority Police; 16 in Sebora chiefdom; and three in Tikonko (the pre-war the figure was 23).
24. Interviews with peace monitors, Bo, March 3, 2005.
25. For example, the Annual Crime Report of the SLP attributes the increase in crime rates in the western area to, inter alia, "lots of idlers and unemployed youth roaming about".
26. With 3000 Karamajor having gone to Liberia to fight, they acknowledge that there is a threat of their imminent return. Interview with J. Sandy, Office of National Security, January 27, 2005.
27. Interview with youth leaders, Makeni, February 20, 2005.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Interview with youth leader, February 8, 2005.
30. Interview with Kenneth Tommy, Town Chief, Yengema, February 8, 2005.
31. Interview with Sahr Babonjo, Town Chief, Tombodou, February 9, 2005.
32. Interview with Women's Leader, Tombodou, February 9, 2005.
33. Interviews, February 9, 2005.
34. Interview with General Secretary of MOCKY, February 9, 2005. The Assistant Superintendent of Police of Kono District concurs that they have "much improved". Interview with Clarkson Momoh, February 8, 2005.
35. Interview with executive member, March 1, 2005.
36. Interviews, January 31, 2005.
37. Interview with R. Clarke, January 31, 2005.
38. Interview, February 20, 2005.
39. S Division Local Unit Commander, February 20, 2005.
40. Interviews, February 21, 2005.
41. Interview with J. Sandy, Office of National Security, January 27, 2005.

References

- Abrahamsen, R. and Williams, M. 2005. *The Globalisation of Private Security. Country Report: Sierra Leone*. Aberystwyth: University of Wales.
- Baker, B. 2004a. "Protection from Crime: What Is On Offer for Africans?", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 22,2:165–88.
- _____. 2004b. "Post-Conflict Policing: Lessons From Uganda 18 Years On", *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*. Available at www.jha.ac/articles/a138.htm.
- _____. 2004c. "Multi-Choice Policing in Africa: Is the Continent Following the South African Pattern?", *Society in Transition*, 35,2:204–23.
- _____. 2004d. "Popular Justice and Policing from Bush War to Democracy: Uganda 1981–2004", *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 32:333–48.
- _____. 2005. "Multi-Choice Policing in Uganda", *Policing and Society*, 15,1:19–41.

- Bayley, D. and Shearing, S. 2001. *The New Structure of Policing: Description, Conceptualization and Research Agenda*. Washington DC: US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice.
- Biddle, K. 2000. "Conflict, Security and Development", *Group Bulletin*, March–April:1–4.
- Global Witness [International research and advocacy NGO]. 2001. "Review of the Sierra Leone Diamond Certification System and Proposals and Recommendations for the Kimberley Process for a Fully Integrated Certification System". Available at www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/sierra/report/2001/0425gw.htm
- Goldsmith, A. 2003. "Policing Weak States: Citizen Safety and State Responsibility", *Policing and Society*, 13,1:3–21.
- Johnston, L. 2001. "Crime, Fear and Civil Policing", *Urban Studies*, 38,5–6:959–76.
- Kane, Minneh *et al* 2002. "Sierra Leone: Report on Preliminary Review of Justice Sector". Joint report. London: Department for International Development (DFID) and Washington DC: World Bank.
- Loader, I. 2000. "Plural Policing and Democratic Governance", *Social & Legal Studies*, 9,3:323–45.
- Malan, M., Rakate, P. and McIntyre, A. (eds). 2002. *Peacekeeping in Sierra Leone: UNAMSIL Hits the Home Straight*. Monograph 68. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.
- Massaquoi, J. 1999. "Building Mechanisms for Conflict Resolution in South-East Sierra Leone: Sulima Fishing Community Development Project". Paper presented at the First Conference on All-African Principles of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation, Addis Ababa, November. Available at www.reliefweb.int.
- Meek, S. 2003. "Policing Sierra Leone". In Malan, M., Meek, S., Thusi, T., Ginifer, J. and Coker, P. (eds). *Sierra Leone: Building the Road to Recovery*. Monograph 80. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.
- Reno, W. 2004. *Countries at the Crossroads: Country Profile of Sierra Leone*. Available at unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/nispacee/unpan016206.pdf
- Richards, P. 2003. *The Political Economy of Internal Conflict in Sierra Leone*. Working Paper 21. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations and 'Clingendael' Conflict Research Unit. Available at http://www.clingendael.nl/cru/pdf/working_paper_21.pdf.
- Schärf, W. 2000. "Community Justice and Community Policing in Post-Apartheid South Africa: How Appropriate are the Justice Systems of Africa?". Paper delivered at the International Workshop on the Rule of Law and Development: Citizen Security, Rights and Life Choices in Law and Middle Income Countries. University of Sussex: Institute for Development Studies. Available at www.ids.ac.uk/ids/govern/accjust/pdfs/scharf%20paper.pdf.
- Sierra Leone Police (SLP). 2004. "An Investigative Perception Survey on the Performance of the SLP for the First Half of the Year 2004: A Case Study of the Western Area and the Provincial Towns of Makeni, Bo and Kenema". Freetown: SLP.
- _____ 2005. "The Annual Crime Report for the Year 2004". Freetown: SLP.

Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). 2004. "Witness to Truth: Report of Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Provisional)". Freetown: TRC.

Wood, B. 2000. "Malawi Security Sector Reform Pilot Project Report: September 1999 – August 2000". Available at www.nisat.org/security%20sector/August_Project_report.htm.