

**DCAF** Geneva Centre  
for Security Sector  
Governance

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY SECTOR  
ADVISORY TEAM (ISSAT)



# Police Reform

*Lessons from donor programming on accountability, demilitarization  
and representativeness of police institutions*



In a Security Sector Reform (SSR) context, police reform aims to transform the values, culture, policies and practices of police organizations so that police can perform their duties with respect human rights and the Rule of Law. Given the police's direct interaction with the community and the powers typically conferred to them, it is vital to ensure that police officers adhere to high standards of professionalism and accountability in their work. A lack of effective democratic governance and accountability mechanisms over the police forces can have triggering effects on social unrest.

The wide protests across the US and Europe against excessive police use of force focused popular attention on running debates over policing and reform. The COVID-19 pandemic has sharpened this focus further. As State of Emergency measures have been a critical part of the global response to the pandemic, the discretionary powers granted to law enforcement institutions to prevent public gatherings have enabled to abusive behaviours in certain cases.

After several decades of SSR, what have we learnt from donor-supported programming? What has worked in terms of creating accountable, transparent and representative law enforcement institutions?

Below are some of the main takeaways that ISSAT has been able to identify from its Members' security and justice programming, to shed light on some positive examples of change across the world.

## **Police Accountability**

Under this area, four programmes which have explicitly targeted developing multiple levels of accountability and oversight functions of the police.

### **UK support to Sierra Leone**

The UK's funded [Justice Sector Development Programme](#) (JSDP 2005-2010) and [Access to Security & Justice Programme](#) (ASJP 2011-2015) in Sierra Leone have contributed to restoring basic capacity to key oversight and accountability organs of the security sector. Support to the Local Police Partnership Boards have improved community-police relations at the local level. At national level, police oversight was improved through the establishment of an Independent Police Complaints Board (IPCB). DfID targeted multiple levels of accountability aiming for a comprehensive approach of both horizontal and vertical approaches for police accountability. It worked across the Office of National Security (ONS), Ministry of Interior, Central Intelligence & Security Unit (CISU), Ministry of Interior, justice sector and Sierra Leonean community.

The JSDP invested in strengthening various elements of the formal justice sector and successfully helped to establish the Justice Sector Coordination Office (JSCO). The JSDP also worked to bring community voices in an attempt to improve the delivery of basic security and justice services, particularly outside of Freetown. It also helped improve prison conditions.

## **UK's support to Nigeria**

Over a period of 16 years, the two UK programmes helped develop the Nigerian security and justice systems. Between 2010 and 2017, two programmes. The [Security, Justice & Growth Programme](#) (2001-2009) and the [Justice for All programme](#) (2010-2017) improved access to justice for Nigerians. They specifically targeted growing the capability, accountability, and responsiveness of the security and justice sector institutions. J4A worked with state actors, but also joined up with many non-state actors, such as the Sharia Courts, traditional leaders and the Voluntary Police Service. Setting up Community Accountability Forums to foster dialogue between the police, communal security structures and the community has proved to be a practical way to hold the security sector to a certain degree of accountability.

## **EU's support to Mali**

An imperative for the European Union's (EU) work with the Malian security sector is to balance its accountability and effectiveness. To find this balance, the EU, who is providing direct budget support to the Malian authorities, has conditioned this financial support to accountability indicators.

Since the outbreak of the 2012 crisis, the EU has mainly been active in providing training and equipment to enhance the effectiveness of the Malian security forces. It has then more recently bolstered its support to governance and accountability mechanisms within these forces based on segment-specific initial assessments. In addition to providing basic, technical trainings and equipment for security forces, the [EU Training Mission](#) (EUTM) and the [EU Capacity Building Mission](#) (EUCAP) have supported activities targeted towards internal control and accountability mechanisms. For example, EUCAP has been working towards strengthening the internal security by actioning the recommendations from the "Audit de l'inspection générale de la gendarmerie malienne," and the "Audit de l'inspection générale du ministère de la sécurité publique".

## **UK's support to the DRC**

[The Security Sector Accountability and Police Reform](#) (SSAPR) is a five-year programme funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID, 1997-2020). External accountability of the police forces was one of the four key pillars of the programs. To this end, the programme aimed to improve the engagement of the CSOs, media and academics in areas related to security and justice, to improve the control and oversight capacities of the relevant committees in the national and provincial assemblies as well as to ensure the effectiveness of key institutions such as the Inspectorate of General Audit. UK programming in DRC has shown that improved media practices have been effective in establishing external accountability measures. In effect, the evaluation of the programme has shown that media scrutiny of the police action worked as both an incentive to provide a better service and as a threat of punishment in case of improper behaviour. Additionally, the establishment of community forums mechanism, known as forums de quartier has had concrete positive results on external accountability by bringing together communities to discuss safety and security issues. The main challenge in the DRC was related to

the internal accountability of the police. The Ministry of Interior's preparedness to play a strong supervisory role in the operation of the police remained limited while efforts to improve parliamentary and ministry control also met with limited success.

## **Police Demilitarisation**

Most of the recent processes to rebuild internal security forces in line with community security needs and human rights have had very limited success (for example Guatemala, Iraq, DRC, Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, DRC)

The more successful examples include Papua New Guinea and South Africa. What these examples have in common are a strong political intent to transform the police institution and a white paper or strategy consolidating, political intent, institutional commitment and a road map to achieve the objective of building a police institution in line with community security needs and respect to human rights.

### **New Zealand's support to Papua New Guinea**

In Papua New Guinea, Bougainville is a city recovering from conflict with a security ecology comprising many different actors. Here, New Zealand supported a community policing project as part of the political architecture of the 2001 peace agreement. The included a community auxiliary police scheme with sworn police officers, whose role extended beyond policing to include mediation, working with traditional leaders, and supporting community governance mechanisms. This approach was effective and sustainable because it considered the multiple actors involved in policing activities and dispute resolution. This is especially important in a region of legal and normative pluralism, and also engaged with non-state providers of policing and justice services. Thus, the project was attuned to hybrid local justice and security practices. The auxiliary police operated within local conceptions of authority and approaches to dispute resolution, as well as with Bougainville's nascent local-level government system. This linked the authority of the State with that of local social systems.

### **South Africa**

While the South African security sector is not without problems, the transformation of the sector, which took place in the first decade following the end of apartheid, includes notable examples of a well balanced, well sequenced and inclusive transformation process in a fragile context. The reforms in the defence sector are widely cited as significantly contributing to improving both the effectiveness and accountability of the defence forces while ensuring that security sector actors are a source of stability in the process of democratization. Most notably the reform process was structured around four key values, as outlined in the 1996 Defence White Paper:

- Integration and representativeness
- Civil Control over Defense
- Improved international and regional defence cooperation

- The provision of a modern, effective, affordable and accountable defence

These values were the guiding principles and conditioned the efforts at modernization and improving effectiveness.

One of the landmark characteristics of the defence transformation in South Africa was the inclusion of a broader definition of defence and security in the White Paper. This definition focused on human security and a people-centred approach to the operations and mandate of the security forces rather than the classic state-centric approach of the apartheid era. This enabled the reform process to ensure that the new security forces were the right sized, commensurate to the need of ensuring primarily security from external threats, and more affordable (thus also sustainable).

Training of new recruits took place alongside key reforms of the management, planning, and oversight mechanisms of the security forces. New equipment was purchased only after the structures and personnel of the new armed forces was in place and was deemed as accountable, representative and integrated. In this regard, by 1999 South Africa had purchased some of the most modern and advanced technology and combat platforms available. A defining characteristic of the South African defence transformation was that it was led from the beginning by South Africans from both the apartheid-era administration and the African National Congress (ANC). This included defining the vision (Defence White Paper from 1996) to allocating budget.

## **Police Institution Inclusiveness**

Inclusivity is defined as the practice or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized due to their age, gender, ethnicity, etc. In this note, inclusive institutions are considered to be institutions that bestow and protect equal rights and opportunities for all segments of the population. In an SSR context, and among other aspects, this entails the equal access to security and justice services and freedom from discrimination when using those services. Inclusiveness can be addressed in different ways in the process of reform. Among the approaches that have shown a positive impact in fostering inclusiveness in the contexts of their implementation are the following:

- [Local Police Partnership Boards \(LPPBs\), Sierra Leone](#): Established by the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) following the collapse of the country in the 1990s, Local Police Partnership Boards have proven themselves a transformative instrument in increasing trust, participation, and successful policing under the banner of “local needs’ policing.”
- [Community Safety Partnerships \(CSPs\), Nigeria](#): Community Safety Partnerships have been a measure of preventing, reducing and containing the social and environmental intimidation. Threats of a social and environmental nature impacts the quality of people's lives, damages the social fabric and trust within a community, and put a burden on policing services. Community Safety Partnerships have delivered local solutions to local problems by working with local people to establish institutional and organisational coordination and implementing mechanisms.

- [The Philippines: The "Bantay Bayanihan" Forum](#): Building on a decade of capacity building training programmes and joint programming for the military and civil society in the Philippines, a novel initiative created a permanent forum for civil society-military-police coordination and civil society oversight of the security sector. Launched in 2011, the Bantay Bayanihan forum institutionalized the goodwill that began with the 2010 formulation of the Internal Peace and Security Plan (IPSP) that included strong participation from civil society groups.
- In terms of [bottom-up accountability](#), [Ecuador](#) provides the legal and institutional frameworks for increased citizen participation in governance. There are citizen observatories known as Veedurias, which allow citizens to form oversight groups to monitor the implementation of government programs including the National Security Strategy and citizen security at the different governance levels. In the same context, local municipal governments have the obligation to create local municipal security councils or MSC. The participants of the MSC include the mayor, head police officials, judge and prosecutors, civil society, health officials, and other actors such as oil companies. These MSC are also meant to provide some civilian accountability of the security providers, including police. There is an annual process for all government entities to “rendir cuentas” or be accountable to the public via a report on programme implementation and fiscal management.

## **Gender Equality within Police Institutions**

Gender equality in law enforcement institutions is necessary to promote the effective provision of security services to the different segments of the population. In order to prevent gender-based violence, assist victims and investigate these crimes, police officers must be trained to understand the different forms of insecurity faced by men, women, girls and boys. Police reform process need to factor in the differentiated needs of the population, ensure relevant service provision and accountability by the whole population.

DCAF's [Gender and Security Division](#) has compiled [several examples from the field](#), reflecting successes in terms of rendering police institutions more gender equal. One of the examples which stand out are in Liberia where the rebuilding of the Liberian National Police (LNP) commenced in 2005, after the end of Liberia's fourteen-year-long, devastating war. In the aftermath of multiple human rights violations by the Liberian law enforcement, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) designed a “vetting/de-activation programme”, followed by recruitment process, guided by a Gender Policy. This document set a minimum quota of 20% for women inclusion in the police and armed forces, and the LNP established a Female Recruitment Programme. As is often the case, women's educational and professional disadvantages were a significant hinderance in Liberia as well. As a result, the programme selected 150 women to attend classes to receive their high school diplomas. These women, in turn, promised to join and serve in the LNP for a minimum number of years. Affirmative action of this kind expanded the pool of female police recruits without having to lower essential qualifications.