

SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN LIBERIA

***A CASE OF THE LIBERIAN NATIONAL POLICE AND
ITS CAPACITY TO RESPOND TO INTERNAL THREAT
IN THE WAKE OF UNMIL DRAWDOWN IN 2012***

**RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN BY
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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SIPRI**

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Acronyms

AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
CAS	World Bank's Country Assessment Strategy
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DFIF	Britain's Department for International Development
ERU	Emergency Response Unit
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GRC	Governance Reform Commission
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice
LD	Liberian Dollar
LNELA	Liberia National Law Enforcement Association
LNP	Liberia National Police
NACCSOL	National Coalition of Civil Society Organizations
NSS	National Security Sector
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PSU	Police Support Unit
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNPOL	United Nations Police Unit
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

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Executive Summary

Key Findings

The strength of the police is low: Up to date, there are close to 4,000 trained police officers. When doing a ratio analysis, there is on the average, one police officer for every 850 citizens.

Visibility of the Liberian National Police (LNP) nationwide is low: Monrovia is not Liberia. Considering the size of the LNP as compared to the population, the presence of police officers in the counties is considerably low as compared to Monrovia thereby making the rural areas vulnerable to threats of violence and insecurity.

Limited capacity to respond to threats of violence: Due to the combined factors of size and inadequate institutional capabilities, the police is not positioned to respond adequately to threats of violence. This will become an even greater challenge as the United Nations Mission in Liberia begins to drawdown.

Limited budget allocation: The cost for training and logistical support is heavily depended on external partners or actors. While it is true that this initial support is needed, it is imperative that the government takes ownership of the process through adequate budget allocation done on a progressive basis. A recent decision by the United States to provide \$19.75 million to support the LNP will provide necessary funds for additional training, but the US ambassador herself has emphasized that the Liberian government must take responsibility for its police force. She noted, “The US\$19.75 million is intended to support capacity building within the LNP in terms of skills and resources. It is not a substitute for budgetary support that the Liberian government has responsibility for. We cannot pay salaries or provide rice.”ⁱ

Weak Command Structure and supervision: Like many other governance structures, the power and authority of the police is overly centralized even though there are regional command structures. These structures have no control over allocated budgets, limited decision-making processes and inadequate logistical support. These deficiencies hamper their full operational capacity.

Engagement of Civil Society Organizations (CSO) in the process is on an ad hoc basis: Apart from one or two security focused civil society organizations, the SSR reform exercise does not engage the wider civil society community such as human rights and pro-democracy groups in a sustained manner.

Community-police relationship is cordial: Even though in some areas the services provided by Community Policing Forums are unknown to members, there is increasing engagement between the police and community members in joint problem solving, an indication of cordial working relationship.

Unethical behavior among LNP is pervasive: Corruption and petty bribe seeking is still pervasive among LNP officers, particularly those deployed in the field. While training on professional conduct has been provided, low salaries and inadequate incentives are factors that undermine the integrity of the police reform process.

Inadequate engagement between the police and the judiciary: While it is true that constitutionally the police and the courts fall in different branches of government, their engagement is critical as their work is interdependent. A lot of citizens do not understand that the police do not prosecute so when the court releases an accused person due to the lack of evidence to prosecute, communities perceive the police as compromising the case. This undermines the credibility of the police in the eyes of the community.

Recommendations

In response to the key findings, the following recommendations are being advanced

Improved Communication between the judiciary and the police: The community believes that failures to deliver justice inside the court system are LNP failures as well. Any corruption or mismanagement of the judiciary exacerbates the relationship between the community and the LNP. The government must recognize this connection and understand that no matter how professional the LNP becomes, it will be viewed as a failure if the court system remains chronically flawed.

Ensure Budget Allocation for LNP: To engender national ownership, increase budget allocation needs to be a priority like other ministries so that the institutional capacity of the police is strengthened.

Increase the strength of the police: The government is under obligation to protect its citizens irrespective of location. The thin spread of police officers across the country does not guarantee the protection of citizens. It is critical for the size of the LNP to be increased to make it more visible in other parts of the country thereby contributing to citizens' confidence in the governance process.

Improve Middle Management: Improved oversight of middle management outside of Monrovia is a crucial issue that the Liberian government should address before UNMIL draws down. The LNP at all levels remain frustrated with the difficult and protracted communications between Monrovia and LNP outposts throughout the country. Without constructive oversight mechanisms in place upper management is unaware of the corruptions up-country and middle-level management up-country do not feel that concerns are heeded and their needs are met. Regular, formalized communication between middle management and upper manage is key to improving relations and increasing accountability.

Ensure devolution of police structure: Decentralization of police command structure is not enough. There is a need for the devolution of the LNP to give regional commanders more authority over decision-making and financial matters as well as to make the LNP more accountable to the communities they serve. Throughout Liberia, LNP regional leadership is embedded with LNP depots in the larger towns and cities outside of Monrovia. Developing regional headquarters separate from county-level police stations is critical to establishing clear chains of command and effective communications networks in Liberia's leeward counties.

Station Emergency Response Units (ERUs) and Police Support Units (PSUs) Regionally

Maintaining a small group of ERU officers in regional LNP headquarters could provide community members piece of mind and would ensure that there is capacity outside of Monrovia to quickly respond to murder, armed robbery and episodes of mass violence. Although there are a few notable exceptions, ERUs and PSUs are perceived as well trained and qualified to combat mob violence and corporeal threats against civilians. Currently, ERU and PSUs officers are headquartered in Monrovia, and due to logistical constraints, getting ERU units out of the city to respond to threats takes time. In Lofa County, ERU units used United Nation (UN) helicopters to reach ethnic skirmishes that killed nine people before they were quelled. Furthermore, murder and armed robbery suspects are likely to have fled well before ERU officers could respond to incidents.

Improve access to information on Community Policing Forums: The forums are an important platform through which community members can engage with the police. The forums are also a primary conduit through which LNP engages with and accesses information from the community.

Engage a wider civil society network in SSR:

Civil society organizations have thus far not offered a strong, unified voice in support of meaningful LNP improvement in anticipation of UNMIL's withdraw. Several organizations continue to do good work around police reform. However civil society lacks a meaningful coalition organized around LNP improvement. The space needs to be created for the active participation of civil society in the reform process to ensure greater accountability of the management of the LNP.

Ensure that UNMIL Transfers Capacity to LNP Management and Civil Society

Currently, security is predicated on UNMIL's continued presence. This is especially true in regions not easily accessible by Monrovia-based ERUs. As UNMIL security personnel begin to leave, priority must be given to ensuring that those regions entirely reliant on the UN's peacekeeping capacity to respond to violence are provided mechanisms to quickly respond to armed violence. ERUs can and should be deployed to respond to high profile instances. However, in counties such as Lofa or Maryland, they cannot get to regions in time.

1. Introduction

When fourteen years of war ended in Liberia in 2003, Liberian officials—in concert with a strong United Nations presence and active foreign governments, especially the United States—began the difficult work of rebuilding a government that for decades had flourished by preying on the population it was meant to govern. Liberia is currently home to United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the world’s second largest UN peacekeeping operation. UNMIL’s presence has provided necessary security, stability and support to the country in the immediate post-war period. However, the force is scheduled to begin pulling out of the country in earnest after the presidential election in 2011. How the Liberian government moves forward without UNMIL’s leadership is a crucial question that is especially important when examining the security sector. In the absence of the increased credibility given to the Liberian National Police (LNP) through its collaboration with UNMIL—most notably the UN police (UNPOL)—the LNP faces a confidence challenge as UNMIL sets into motion its drawdown plan.

Although the Liberian government strongly supports security sector reform (SSR), it has not done enough to take the lead in reform efforts, instead relying on external actors to take control. The government’s highest priority has been development, and it has therefore primarily focused on economic revitalization and the attraction of foreign investors. These efforts have been recognized by the international community, most notably through the World Bank’s decision in July 2010 to relieve Liberia of \$4.6 billion in debt obligations on the occasion of the country reaching its Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) completion point.

Despite the necessity of comprehensive security sector reform to Liberia’s economic growth, experts agree that the current efforts at police reform have been piecemeal and that without the presence of UNMIL ongoing reform will be faced with huge challenges regarding coordination, command and supervision. An effective, sustainable SSR strategy must include short, medium and long-term goals that are attainable and buttressed by adequate, continued funding from the Liberian government. Experts agree that SSR must be case specific, and UN documents note that “security sector reform must be context-driven and that the needs will vary from situation to situation.”ⁱⁱ

Search for Common Ground undertook this research to identify gaps in the capacity of the Liberian government to oversee the LNP without external support and guidance from UNMIL and other actors. Its objective was to develop, together with wide sections of the Liberian citizenry, a set of recommendations to address ongoing LNP reform in light of UNMIL’s forthcoming withdrawal. Search for Common Ground first conducted a desktop literature review of major policy documents on SSR in Liberia. The findings served as the basis for developing, directing and conducting key informant interviews

with policy makers and civil society and focus group interviews with community members. A perception survey seeking to gain insight into various facets of the Liberian community's view of the LNP and its relationship with UNMIL in anticipation of the UN drawdown was administered in five of Liberia's 15 counties.

The following section provides a brief overview of the SSR concept, looking specifically at SSR in West Africa and in particular at SSR in Liberia. The third section gives an overview of key documents related to LNP reform. The fourth section identifies gaps in the government that need to be considered to accomplish meaningful LNP reform in the transition to UNMIL's withdrawal. The fifth section looks at community perceptions of the LNP. The report ends with conclusions and a set of recommendations for action. The fifth section looks at community perceptions of the LNP. The report ends with conclusions and a set of recommendations for action.

2. Security Sector Reform and the Liberian National Police

2.1. A general overview of security sector reform

Security Sector Reform (SSR) is one of the critical elements necessary for the consolidation of peace in post-war Liberia. Security Sector Reform (SSR) is a relatively new construct, and the term was first coined in 1998 by Clare Short, the United Kingdom's first Minister for Development.ⁱⁱⁱ The term was created in response to the experiences of development experts on the ground in post-conflict countries, which underscored the obvious fact that uncorrupted police and military are necessary for stability as well as any sustainable growth and revitalization. While SSR includes the military and other security apparatus, this paper focuses on the police and its capacity to maintain the peace in the wake of UNMIL's drawdown plan.

As the concept of SSR continues to evolve and best practices continue to be developed based upon extensive fieldwork, questions regarding its nature and scope continue to be explored. For example, should judicial reform be included in SSR discussions? Which police duties should be prioritized through reform efforts? In its reports, Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) has explicitly commented on internal debates around whether the "justice functions" of the police should be included in SSR efforts.^{iv} While the international community continues to look at how best it can work cooperatively to support projects aimed at increasing security and rule of law, it is clear is that reforming countries must work with donor states and organizations to create the best possible relationship to facilitate long-term success after external funding ends and international technical expertise is no longer widely available in country.^v

SSR is a multifaceted concept that is related to governance, political and technical issues. In a post-conflict setting like Liberia, the sustainability of SSR can be severely undermined if it does not go hand in hand with addressing the governance issues that gave rise to the conflict. SSR is a political issue in that the political will needs to be demonstrated by the government in terms of adequate budget support to professionalize the sector. Lastly, it is a technical issue in that the government needs the requisite skills, experiences, and competencies to respond to needs of men and women being trained.

2.2. Useful Lessons from Security Sector Reform in Sierra Leone and Ghana

West Africa has been an unfortunate hotbed of instability and violence throughout recent history. The lessons of Liberia's neighbors provide particularly important examples and insights for the Liberian government and its international partners. The interconnected nature of conflict in the region makes exploring these connections especially important.

Liberia's northern neighbor Sierra Leone is undergoing its own security sector reform process in the aftermath of a conflict with which Liberia was intimately involved. The United Kingdom took the lead rebuilding the entirety of Sierra Leone's security sector. Britain's colonial history in Sierra Leone as well as its military presence to help combat that country's violence made the decision a logical one for the British government. However, no such external entity has a similar stake in Liberia. Therefore, while the United States has dominated many SSR discussions, it is not making the entirety of SSR its responsibility. This has left large questions unanswered regarding the future of the Liberian National Police, given that its reform and restructuring was put in the hands of UNMIL, which is set to begin its drawdown after the 2011 Presidential election.

The Sierra Leone case also offers several examples of successful civil society engagement, which could prove helpful as Liberia continues its own reform efforts. For example, in Sierra Leone civil-military district oversight committees have brought civil society leaders to the table at the local level to discuss impediments to continued progress and possible solutions to current problems. These committees have been widely lauded and are among the many mechanisms that the Liberian government could explore to improve oversight of the LNP as UNMIL begins to drawdown.

Ghana is also undertaking reform. And although the country has enjoyed relative peace and stability compared to many of its neighbors, its efforts to improve its security sector can also be used as a reference for Liberian decision-makers. Ghanaian reform has been criticized for the lack of legislative oversight: a problem is shared by many of its neighbors, including Liberia. The presence of these issues in Ghana demonstrates that a country's democratization does not ensure a transparent and democratic security sector.^{vi}

2.3. Liberia National Police

During the war, both Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and the Liberia National Police (LNP) preyed upon Liberia's population with impunity. By war's end, no trust remained between the Liberian people and the entities tasked with ensuring civilian safety. Reform of the security sector was therefore crucial and was highlighted in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement ending war in 2003. The United States was given primary responsibility for army reform and has undertaken that process through a comprehensive contract with the private company DynCorp. Through a Chapter VII mandate, UN Security Council Resolution 1509 placed LNP reform under UNMIL's leadership. Currently, there are roughly 4,000 LNP officers deployed throughout the country in several different units.

In March 2006, in an effort to promote female leadership within the Liberia's security apparatus, Beatrice Munah Sieh was appointed first-ever female LNP chief. In July 2009 she was replaced by Marc Amblard. Amblard proven much more effective than Munah Sieh at keeping LNP middle management in line, and observers and officers contend that for better or worse, middle-level management seems more willing to cooperate

with and take orders from the new leadership. That female leadership was unable to keep order and lead effectively sets unsettling precedent for the LNP, and the replacement of the Munah Sieh's leadership at the LNP with an all male leadership reinforces the public's perception that the handling of security matters is within the sole domain of men. However, Comments offered by several experts emphasized the good faith efforts on the part of LNP Chief Marc Amblard and other high-level leadership.

Despite the general opinion of current competence, management and command structure of the LNP remains weak. Police reform is taking place but this is not done concurrently with other governance reform initiatives such as decentralization or devolution to give more authority to regional offices. Similar to problems inherent in other governmental sectors, difficulties remain between Liberia's capital city and rural counties. Without accountability mechanisms in place that reach more remote LNP outposts, communities are quick to note leadership failures within the LNP.

The quality of LNP regional leadership is also a crucially important issue. The LNP has regional commanders responsible for certain amount of counties. For Bong, Nimba and Lofa Counties, the commander is based in Gbarnga at the police headquarter. Supervision of the region is challenge due to limited logistics and no radio communication system. The regional police commander's office is located in the Gbarnga police station. In interview with the Bong County Commander, he indicated that the presence of the Regional Commander tends to undermine his authority and not healthy for the command structure.

The scarcity of officers and depots up-country was a major concern for LNP officials working in more remote areas. Communities were highly critical of LNP response to crime and threat of violence both inside and outside of Monrovia, and many in remote communities identified the lack of officers as a crucial problem. Outside the capital the issue was more acute given the territory that one depot is meant to serve. In Monrovia's Freeport community, police were perceived as always available diligent to duty. They were routinely seen on foot making patrols. Comparatively, in Lofa County, where there was a distinctly negative perception of the LNP, the police were not visible doing their job, and were instead routinely seen drunk and acting unethically. It is important to note, however, that civilians living within very close proximity to LNP depots up-country expressed the same frustrations about police behavior and its dilatory or non-existent responses to civilian claims. Therefore, while calls for more officers may have merit, focus groups demonstrate that increased police presence is not a panacea.

An important aspect of the LNP reform relates to the agreed process for recruiting police officers. The recruitment process considered the exclusion of anyone who actively took part in war from participating in security sector reform efforts. At the beginning of the reform process, parties worked with International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) to develop a "justice-sensitive" vetting procedure that would help to ensure that human rights violators were not hired into the LNP's ranks.

However, numerous exceptions to that rule have undermined that process and exacerbated the frustrations of former fighters from the lower ranks.

A useful example comes from the LNP's work to clamp down on a spate of armed robberies that has plagued the country over the past few years. When armed robbery became a rampant threat, former police commanders who had been involved in the war effort were brought on to advise the LNP's work to bring the bands of armed robbers to justice.

Furthermore, during the initial vetting process, there were many instances in which the process developed by ICTJ was simply ignored. Protocols called for photographs of possible recruits to be shown within the community to allow people to identify anyone who had changed their name to escape their history or who might have used a nom de guerre during conflict. However, it became common for officials to simply publish the names of recruits on lists and in newspapers without taking the time to include photos.

2.3.1. Special Units of the Liberian National Police

Ordinary LNP officers are not permitted to carry weapons. As a result, the LNP has worked with UNMIL and other governments, including the German, Irish and US governments, to train specialized units (e.g., Emergency Response Units, ERUs) to respond to instances of mob violence and other emergencies. Unlike ordinary LNP officers, ERU officers carry arms when necessary. However, service weapons assigned to ERU officers are closely monitored, checked in and out as needed and not permitted to be taken home. The UN has lauded these units, and thus far, ERUs have been successfully deployed to disturbances in the Bong Mines, the Sinoe Rubber Plantation and the Liberia Agriculture Company. Initially set to have 500 officers, officials only trained 344 officers, noting that additional assessment have demonstrated that current levels meet Liberia's needs.

In addition to the ERUs, developing capable Police Support Units (PSUs) is also a priority for the government and UNMIL. UN officials hope that such units can help provide some of the logistical support and maintenance that UNPOL and other UN agencies currently provide to LNP officers. Transportation is a crucial aspect of this support. With promises of international funding from France, Germany and the USA, UN officials are confident PSU training can be completed within the next year. American officials have committed to leading training 600 PSU recruits. Police hope that these forces will carry arms and will provide additional support similar to the services provided by ERUs.

Thus, with almost no exceptions, save ERU officers who are permitted to carry guns, the vast majority of LNP officers are unarmed. Community members interviewed noted that LNP officers feared criminals carrying weapons and therefore would delay in responding or not respond at all to cases of armed violence. Community members understood the reasoning behind officers' behavior and sympathized with their plight. However, they expressed dismay at the lack of protection for themselves and their families. When

asked if they would support arming ordinary LNP officers, discussants worried that without extensive additional training, officers would remain ill equipped to handle carrying guns while on duty.

Notably, focus group participants noted that UNPOL were crucial to keeping the peace in those situations in which guns or other arms are used. Without UNPOL officers, the LNP outside of Monrovia do not have the capacity to respond to armed violence. Community members are acutely aware of this reality, and view the UN the only thing protecting them from armed violence. ERUs provide similar support to unarmed LNP officers. However, ERU units are based in Monrovia, making it difficult for them to respond quickly. ERUs were sent to Lofa County to help recent mob violence. However, UN transport was necessary, and UNMIL personnel also worked with the LNP to stop violence.

3. The Liberia National Police: funding, coordination and accountability

3.1 Funding

Resources for LNP reform remain scarce. The most recent class of LNP recruits have been unable to begin work due to lack of LNP funds. High-level LNP personnel praise their officers, but agree with observers that the police in Liberia are chronically under-paid and lack logistical capacity necessary to quickly reach crime scenes and communicate with one another throughout the country.

The World Bank's Liberia Country Assessment Strategy (CAS) states that aid for SSR "is not channeled through government structures". This means that one must look beyond the Liberia National Budget to gain an accurate picture of the money being spent on SSR reform in Liberia. Thus, internal UNMIL budgets would be necessary for a full picture of total expenditures. Although UN officials contacted were unable to provide concrete budget figures to quantify the totality of their investment in the LNP, they were able to estimate that recent international commitments for 2010 was somewhere in the ballpark of \$10.9 million. President Sirleaf has stated publicly that the Liberian government does not know how much money the US spends on SSR. It's quite possible that the same is true of the police.

US officials, most notably the US ambassador to Liberia, continues to advise the Liberian government that it must take responsibility for paying and equipping its soldiers. The government, however, continues to find it difficult to fund the LNP at necessary levels. It took robust intervention from international actors and the inspector general to ensure that 2010 budget funded the LNP at the same level as 2009^{vii}

National budget for 2009-2010 included \$9.2 million for the LNP. Levels are expected to remain similar in 2010-2011. The vast majority of budgeted funds went to personnel costs, most notably LNP salaries. This was a decrease from the 2009-2010 Liberia National Budget, which set government spending on the LNP at \$9.3 million, which itself was up from \$7.3 million during the 2008-2009 fiscal period. It is important to note that these figures do not accurately demonstrate how much money the government has actually spent on police reform.

Furthermore, the government must also prioritize adequate LNP funding. Comparing official statistics demonstrates governmental priorities, and can shed light on governmental priorities. The Ministry of Justice, which includes the LNP, had a total budget of \$15.3 million, and represented 5.7 percent of the Liberia's total budget. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education represented 5.4 percent (\$15.1 million) and 7.2 percent (\$16.6 million) of this budget respectively.

In sum, the Liberian government must have an accurate picture of total security sector expenditures if it is going to effectively lead reform efforts. The government must also ensure that it has a steady funding stream to support reform efforts, and UNMIL must ensure that any continued UN presence in Liberia takes care to continue to support those areas that the government does not have the capacity to handle.

A key part of the future success of LNP reform will depend on the coordination of its reform in conjunction with the reform of other agencies. It will also depend on the clarification of the roles, responsibilities and relationships between the LNP and the judiciary. It will also require the ethical oversight of the legislature and the engagement of civil society.

Other than providing vehicles and uniforms, external actors have not taken a large role in reforming several critical economic sectors, including the Immigration Bureau, prison and correction centers, National Bureau of Investigation, and Drug Enforcement Agency. Lack of reform of these institutions has been of great concern to Liberians. That these institutions, currently under government control, have not undertaken proper reform should be of concern if and when external actors begin handing over LNP reform and training efforts over to the police.

In both Nimba and Lofa counties, which both sit along Liberia's border with several neighbors, the community worries about corrupt immigration officials as much as they worried about LNP behavior. Furthermore, because civilians in many cases do not make distinctions between the different official functions of different Liberian uniformed security personnel, misbehavior within other security agencies threaten the relationship between the LNP and the communities it is meant to serve.

At the same time, there exists a close link between LNP and judicial reform to the maintenance of peace and security in a post-conflict environment. While the connection is very well established in theory, in practice, linking the two sectors has remained a huge challenge. A useful example of the relationship between the judiciary and the police in Liberia is criminal release. If no charge is made against a suspect within 48 hours of being arrested, Liberian law stipulates that they must be released back into the community. Although the prosecution of criminals is not the responsibility of the LNP, LNP officers are blamed when criminals are not charged with a crime and are therefore released into the community. Thus, when criminals are released back into the community, the public does not differentiate between the failures of one or the other.

When community members see criminals who perpetrated crimes against them walking the streets, they assume that the LNP actively works with the criminals to facilitate their release, no matter the actual circumstances. Civilians routinely cite this practice as one that instigates fear in the community and decreases the likelihood that victims will report crimes to the police. Furthermore, many civilians assume that criminal release is an example of police corruption. For example, Focus group participants told Search staff

that LNP personnel let criminals out of jail to run errands for them during evening hours and frequently allowed criminals to pay them in order to have the ability to roam the streets when they should have been jailed. In Lofa county, women believed that LNP officers released criminals into the community at night to run officers' errands and that officers actively worked with drug dealers who paid them to be released.

Without a well-trained police force to gather and store evidence, prosecution becomes difficult. Similarly, an opaque and corrupt judicial system misuses good police work, which undermines public confidence in state-run institutions.

Under the Doctrine of Separation of Power as contained in the 1986 Liberian Constitution, the National Legislature has oversight responsibility over the Executive Branch of Government in the implementation of government's policies, and it is perceived by the public that it has not exercised this role sufficiently enough with respect to the reform of the LNP. Furthermore, as the Liberian government takes increased control over the police it is especially important that the legislature not only step up its oversight role but also its budgetary role and its relationship to the stability of LNP reform.

The legislature's possible role overseeing and ensuring transparency in the reform process is made more difficult because of the history of many elected members of the legislature: some members of that body were intimately involved in the war. Four sitting senators were indicted in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report released in 2010.

Although police reform has had no shortage of technical expertise, many civil society organizations worry that the process is overlooking issues of governance.^{viii} Civil society organizations in Liberia have been active in playing their "watch dog role" in terms of demanding accountability and transparency on matters concerning the governance of the country. Women's organizations, the media, professional associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) all have unique insights into the reform process. The NSS understands this fact, and includes language making civil society participation a necessary component of the SSR process.

The Liberia National Law Enforcement Association (LNELA) and other civil society organizations throughout Liberia continue to hold the LNP to account. In partnership with the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), the LNLEA brought together 81 civil society organizations for a series of discussions on Security Sector reform. This conference, which advocated for the creation of an Independent Technical Advisory Committee on SSR, came one year after more than one hundred groups established the National Coalition of Civil Society Organizations (NACCSOL) and called for broadened "civil society input into the reform process."^{ix} The ICTJ continues to work with the LNLEA and other groups as part of a Working Group on SSR. However, in order for their effort to continue being effective, the government must engage civil society in a more

sustained manner rather on an ad hoc basis as it is currently being done. Civil Society partnership with the government needs to be institutionalized so that the expertise and experience of civil society can be leveraged by the government in its SSR exercise.

4. Literature Review

There are several documents that are critical to understanding the SSR reform in Liberia, specifically as they relate to the Liberian National Police. They include the 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the National Security Strategy (NSS), Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and UNMIL drawdown plan. These documents were key to shaping the interview questions that individuals and focus group members were asked and also informed the perception survey which was conducted. The following is an overview of some of the requirements and challenges presented by these documents.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement specifies the external actors meant to take the lead on SSR, while the NSS and the PRS are the primary documents outlining the government's vision for Liberia's security sector. Both the NSS and PRS build on "goals" set out in UN Security Council Resolution 1509 and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

While these documents include important goals and benchmarks, they do not include detailed instructions regarding the proper role of government in police reform. Similarly, other widely available government and UN documents also do not specify the government's exact role in reforming and training the LNP. Furthermore, it is important to note that documents do not offer a complete view of the status quo due to the differences between the de facto and du jour government role in reform efforts.

However, they do provide insights into what official roles are meant to be within the context of Liberian SSR's initial theoretical construct as well as priorities that have been arrived at through consultative processes. Comparing the reality of current reform efforts with what is outlined in print will create the opportunity to identify areas in which the government might have the capacity for improved engagement. Furthermore, improving governmental activities in those areas in which the government is not participating in the way in which it was envisioned could help fill gaps in advance of UNMIL's withdrawal.

Civil society organizations were consulted throughout the drafting of both the NSS and the PRS, and civil society leaders speak highly of the collaborative process inherent in the creation of those key documents. However, the inadequate participation of broad-based civil society organizations in meetings of the Security Pillar of the PRS and security meetings with UNMIL raises doubt concerning the role of civil society in SSR when external actors pull out.

4.1 The National Security Strategy and the Poverty Reduction Strategy

The National Security Strategy, which was officially approved in January 2008, describes the government's approach to reforming the army and the police while outlining its long-term goals in its efforts to protect Liberian citizens.^x The document explicitly states that it is not meant to be a defense police review. Instead, the NSS identifies broader strategic concerns and seeks to provide a framework within which the policies of the various security sector organizations, including defense (sic) policy, can be developed so as to ensure coherence and effectiveness in meeting the overall security needs of Liberia.

The Strategy was drafted by the Governance Reform Commission (GRC), which places several additional burdens on itself inside the document. The GRC is tasked with undertaking an assortment of consultations with stakeholders (including private interests and government agencies), drafting national security policy and strategy, reviewing security legislation and establishing a process SSR review within each government sector.

Dr. Amos Sawyer, Liberia's former interim President, heads the Governance Commission (GC). In his capacity as a professor at Indiana University as well as his position as a visiting fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars in Washington, DC, Dr. Sawyer is not in Liberia for more than a few months at a stretch. GRC progress has been sporadic at best. This is a problematic sign given its role in police reform. As UNMIL draws down, the GRC will be tasked with increasing responsibility. The body needs to prepare itself for its new role and ensure that it has access to requisite expertise to take the lead in putting forward logical benchmarks that ensure the maintenance of a basic security baseline.

The PRS articulates similar themes to those included in the Accra Agreement and the NSS. Through its peace and security pillar, the PRS also provides mechanisms for coordinating Liberia's security sector. This important tool facilitates quarterly security pillar meetings that bring together Liberian officials, as well as UNMIL leaders and US diplomats to strategize about security and ways forward.

The peace and security pillar includes a "Priority Action Matrix", whose strategic objectives include:

1. To provide strategic and statutory guidance for security institutions
2. To build the capacity of security institutions
3. To provide adequate territorial protection and law enforcement services to the general population of Liberia
4. To ensure institutional participation in security governance and functions.

The PRS places the onus on the government to protect its citizens from “threats of physical violence that endanger their basic survival,” and emphasizes the concept of “human security”, which provides a civilian-based view of countries’ security and stability. Although it explicitly states that “the LNP is the primary operational agency responsible for internal security”, it is also open about the difficulties inherent in LNP vetting processes and emphasizes the need for comprehensive training (including the development of ERUs).

4.2. UNMIL’s Drawdown Plans and Liberia National Police benchmarks

UNMIL has been in Liberia for more than five years with a mandate of maintaining peace and security. That mandate has been extended to 2012. The mission has a current police presence of 1,400 and 8,000 military force. After 2012, there will be a transition and the government will be directly responsible for taking over the security of the country in the wake of the drawdown of UNMIL.

As part of its capacity building efforts, UNMIL has presence in LNP stations and depots across the country and this provides a crucial accountability mechanism meant to ensure that LNP officers use their training and remain ethical. Respondents in those communities where UN personnel were embedded with the LNP had a more positive view of the force than in regions without a UN presence overseeing the station. In Monrovia, where UNPOL is stationed at every depot, the LNP generally were viewed more positively. However, respondents worried that police behavior will erode the moment that UN presence ends. In other parts of Monrovia where the UN was not a consistent presence inside police stations, respondents praised instances in which the UN engaged with the community to combat violence. In Bong County, LNP officers as well as community members noted the daily presence of UN officials who visit stations daily to check records and ask questions about what progress is being made. For these reasons among others, the UNMIL’s drawdown and the facilitation of this transition are critical to Liberia’s stability.

UNMIL’s preliminary drawdown plans call for a gradual reduction of 498 police advisers in seven stages between April 2009 and December 2010. It is clear in the plan that there will be no drawdown of corrections officers, but they will decrease UNPOL personnel to 742 by December 2010. Other decisions about UNMIL police support will be based on a series of core benchmarks outlined in UN documents. Possible government consultations are not explicitly defined in the document, but will most likely be included as UNMIL staff continues planning for after 2011.

UNMIL documents note that the following benchmarks will be used to make decisions regarding personnel withdrawal:

- a. Completion of the basic training of 3,500 personnel of the Liberian National Police by July 2007
- b. Completion of police operating procedures by December 2008

- c. Completion of the formation of the 500-strong Police Quick Reaction Unit by July 2009
- d. Equipping of police personnel and their deployment to the countries, as well as building of police infrastructure by December 2010
- e. Finalization of the national security strategy and architecture and their implementation throughout the country by December 2008
- f. Training and operationalization of the first and second Armed forces battalions by September 2008 and September 2009 respectively.

UNMIL officials confirm that all initial benchmarks have been met. However, they are in the process of developing a new set of criteria through which they can judge the LNP as UNMIL begins to withdraw personnel.^{xi} United Nations personnel seem to understand at least some of the problems currently facing the police. UN official Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu was quoted praising the LNP while also noting that “The LNP is facing a very real operational dilemma. While they are steadfastly improving in the quality of police service delivered, they are also increasingly challenged by the imbalance between operational demands and available budgetary allocations.”^{xii}

Other official documents outline specific goals for the LNP. For example, the 2009-2010 Liberian National Budget asks the LNP to reduce crime in Monrovia more than 70 percent in one fiscal year. The LNP is also eight percent shy of reaching its goal of 20 percent female participation. While aspiration to such high standards is positive, the government must have more manageable benchmarks it can look towards on its path to achieving loftier and longer-term goals.

Benchmarks are important indicators of progress. However, attention must be paid to the quality of the current force as well as the Liberian government’s capacity to continue reform efforts. Furthermore, more abstract considerations of the efficacy of the current security sector must also be taken into account. Achieving the above-mentioned goals is an important step forward. However, these accomplishments are much less relevant if Liberians are not enjoying the benefits of reform efforts.

5. Community Perceptions of the LNP

A survey comprising 26 questions was administered to 503 participants of diverse backgrounds in Monrovia and five other counties (Bong, Lofa, Nimba, Cape Mount and Grand Gedeh) to gauge citizens' perception related to the progress the LNP has made and its relationship to both the United Nations and to the community at large. In addition to the survey, twelve focus group discussions were held in Monrovia and four of the five counties mentioned above targeting 96 persons (see appendix for a summary of findings). Questions touched on police presence as well as the LNP's capacity to respond to gender-based violence and the spate of armed robberies that have wreaked havoc on communities since the end of the war. When divided by age and gender, responses remained fairly uniform. There were, however, marked differences in perception when responses were divided by counties surveyed. The third used to generate information was Key Informant Interviews conducted with UNMIL, UNPOL, government agencies and civil society organizations (See appendix for listing).

There are myriad factors that contribute to the variances in community perceptions of LNP performance such as the level of civilian engagement with community policing forums, ethnic dimensions and region.

5.1. The regional divide

Several factors help to explain the differences between perceptions in Monrovia and perceptions outside major cities. They include UNMIL's constant presence in almost all of Monrovia's LNP depots as well as easier access to transportation and the higher population densities, which ensure that officers are responsible for vastly smaller areas inside Montserrado County. The presence of UNMIL police puts pressure on the newly recruited police officers to perform as well as to behave in a more professional manner.

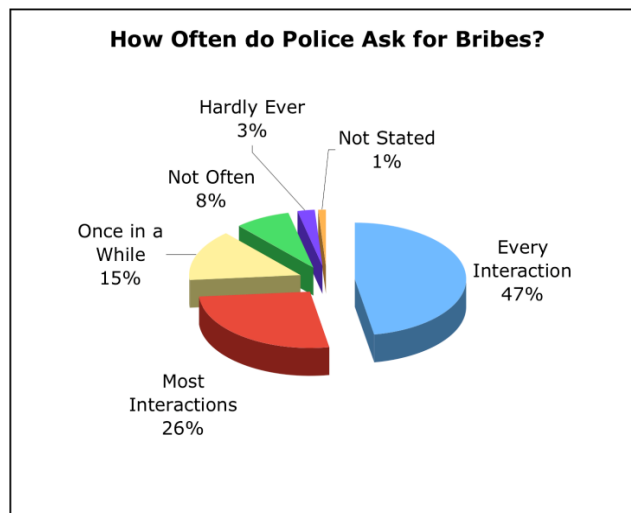
Another reason many discussants in Monrovia felt comfortable with LNP officers in their communities was that they had personal connections with officers or the officers' families. Participants in several Monrovia communities were pleased that young LNP officers were familiar with the communities in which they were serving and believed that placing officers in communities in which they had a history helped to mitigate the issues inherent in having a brand new force in place. One discussant, an elder in one of the communities in Monrovia referred to LNP officers as "children who we have dealt with in the community." This shows the community's familiarity with the newly recruited officers.

Outside of Monrovia, most LNP officers were assigned to locations that they did not originally hailed from and were therefore strangers to the community. Community members interviewed from rural counties felt that LNP officers assigned to their areas were not investing in the community's wellbeing and had been forced to work in regions where they did not want to live. High-levels of desertion in these regions provided the

community with further proof that LNP officers from elsewhere were unhappy with assignments in counties such as Lofa and Nimba far away from their families.

5.2. Police Behavior

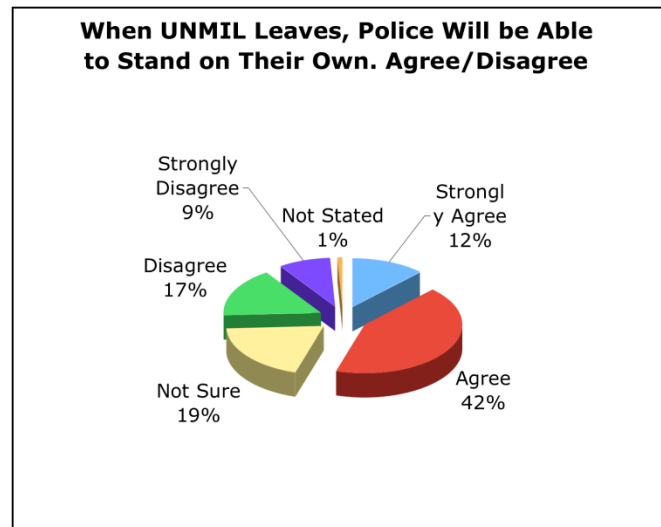
The most important factor contributing to the community's perception of the LNP is how the police behave while interacting with civilians. Focus group participants had personal stories about police misbehavior and corruption including paying bribes and extra fees on demand from officers in order to have their claims processed. Drunken officers harassed others, and several more witnessed police brutality firsthand. In one particularly troublesome incident, Lofa County residents witnessed an inebriated and armed ERU officer attacking an unarmed civilian over a personal dispute that resulted to the man being injured. This demonstrates a mark of indiscipline on the part of the ERU.



LNP personnel throughout the country worried that community members were focusing on those “few bad apples” inside any bureaucratic structure and were not looking at the majority of the force who acted in the community's best interest. However, the argument does not address the lack of oversight or disciplinary mechanisms within the LNP, both of which were highlighted in several focus groups. Furthermore, focus group participants did seem aware that not all LNP officers were unethical to the point of breaking the law (there was a strong perception that many were).^{xiii} But in the absence of meaningful and productive interactions with better-behaved officers, participants could only measure police performance through their interactions with drunken officers in uniform or officials who forced them to pay hundreds of Liberian dollars to respond to harassment claims.

A question asking how often the police asked for bribes highlighted the community's continued perception that pervasive corruption remains rampant within the LNP. 47.1% of respondents believe that police ask for bribes each and every time they interact with a civilian. 26.4% believe it is true most of the time, and only 7.1% believe that it does

not happen often. Grand Cape Mount County was the only location where the majority of respondents believed bribes were rarely demanded (35.6% of those surveyed responded that bribes were not often solicited).



65.8% of total respondents believe that police reform is headed in the right direction. While exact percentages varied, a majority in all six counties surveyed agreed with the claim. Nimba provided the largest percentage of positive responses (87.2% agreed or strongly agreed). Grand Gedeh and Montserrado counties both also had overwhelmingly positive responses. Although the majority of participants still answered this question positively, a much larger minority of people in Bong and Lofa counties did not agree that reform was headed in the right direction. A similar pattern in Bong and Lofa have a more negative view of the LNP and its progress as compared to Montserrado, Grand Gedeh and Nimba counties continue throughout the survey.

5.3. Safety and Security Concerns:

Respondents were asked to identify the greatest threat to themselves and their family. Ten options were provided, including gender-based violence, drugs, war in neighboring countries as well as unemployment, youth unemployment and poverty. Unemployment was the most common response (36%). However both poverty (21.7%) and armed robbery (18.5%) garnered a substantial percentage of responses. Youth unemployment was the fourth most chosen response (9.7%). Grand Gedeh, Nimba and Montserrado were the three countries for which unemployment was the highest frequency response, while poverty was the most chosen answer in Bong (58.6%) and Grand Cape Mount (46.7%). Lofa was the only county for which armed robbery was the most common choice, which highlights that region's especially fragile security situation.

Whereas more than 76% of those surveyed believed Liberia to be safer now than it was in 2008, the figure was only 45.7% in Bong County. The county with the second lowest percentage was Montserrado, with a figure of 74.8%.

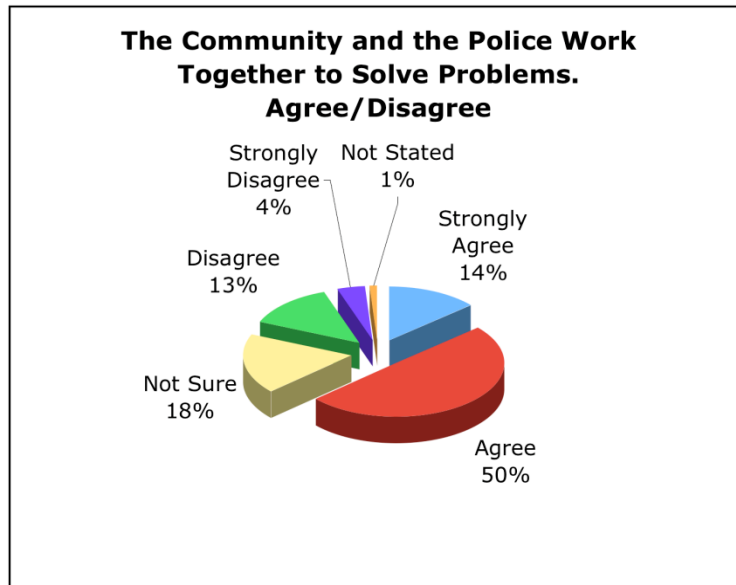
A slightly different question, which asked respondents whether or not they feel personally safer now compared to 2008, produced a similar divide. 19.1% of total respondents felt less safe, compared to 42.9% in Bong County. Answers differed greatly county-by-county. 34.1% of respondents in Grand Gedeh and 23.7% Lofa felt less safe. Only 2.2% of Cape Mount residents and 2.3% of Nimba county residents, however, felt similarly.

Additionally, only 31.4% of those surveyed in Bong Country believed that street crime has decreased since 2008. Strong majorities in every other county surveyed expressed the opposite view. (Figures in Grad Gedeh and Lofa Counties were 90.2% and 81.4% respectively.) Furthermore, Bong was the only county where the majority of respondents believed that there had been no reduction in armed robbery and that the LNP do not handle a GBV or rape case fairly when it is brought to their attention.

5.4 Awareness of Community Policing Forums

Experts agree that Community Policing Forums have the potential to drastically improve the relationship between police and civilians. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has funded several such Forums on a seemingly ad-hoc basis, and there has been a push to institutionalize these Forums throughout the country. County authorities coordinating these forums as well as the civilians taking the lead in their own communities believe strongly that they are a crucial link between police and the community. However, responses from community members were mixed on their level of awareness about the forums and the services they provide.

Of those surveyed, 39.8% were aware of a Community Policing Forum in their community. Responses were very different county-by-county, which is logical given that certain regions most likely have more robust and well-publicized mechanisms in place than others. 82.9% of respondents in Grand Gedeh County knew about the Community Policing Forum in their community, while 68.9% of Grand Cape Mount residents knew about such a forum in that county. In Montserrado County, 49% noted that there was such a forum in their community. For other countries, however, awareness was much lower. In Bong County, only 7.1% of respondents had heard of a Community Policing Forum. Lofa County's figure was only 8.5%.



Because a statistically significant percentage of respondents in all counties surveyed were aware of Community Policing Forums, it can be logically assumed that Forum's existed in the regions surveyed, but that, to date, large proportions of the community are not aware of their existence. Key informant interviews conducted in Lofa County provides evidence to buttress this claim. County officials in Voinjama lauded the Community Policing Forum they had created. However, the vast majority of residents who took part in the survey and focus groups did not think such a mechanism existed.

When asked if "The community and the police work together to solve problems", 63.2% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement as compared to 18.3% who said they were not sure. In Cape Mount, the not sure response was considerably high with 42.2%.

5.5 Relationship to the United Nations

UNMIL's presence in the LNP stations and depots provides a crucial accountability mechanism meant to ensure that LNP officers use their training in a professional manner and remain ethical. Respondents in those communities where UN personnel were embedded with the LNP had a more positive view of the force than in regions without a UN presence overseeing the station.

In Monrovia where UNPOL is stationed at every depot, the LNP generally were viewed more positively. However, respondents worried that police will erode the moment that UN presence ends. In other parts of Monrovia where the UN was not a consistent presence inside the police stations, respondent praised instances in which the UN engaged with community to combat violence.

In Bong County, LNP officers as well as community members noted the daily presence of UN officials who visit stations daily to check records and ask questions about what progress has been made. Residents in Lofa County praised the Pakistani UNMIL battalion stationed there for its professionalism and responsiveness to the February 2010 violence.

Throughout Liberia, UN officers work alongside police at stations and depots. Furthermore, UN vehicles and other mobile support are commonly used to transport LNP officers to respond to cases. Survey participants were overwhelmingly aware of the support the UN provides to the LNP. 73.9% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that UNMIL provides technical and logistical support to the LNP.

Despite this obvious and well-known dependence, 54.8% of those surveyed believe that when UNMIL leaves, the police will be able to stand on their own. Security personnel interviewed did not agree with the statement. Totals for this question sub-divided by county demonstrate regional differences in perception of the LNP. Montserrado's 202 participants provide the largest percentage of those who strongly agree (15.8%), and 56.7% of respondents in Montserrado either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Participants were even more optimistic in Nimba County, where 75.6% of participants responded favorably to the question. Grand Gedeh had similar results. Comparatively, results in several counties, most notably Lofa, were decidedly more pessimistic. 42.4% of Lofa residents surveyed disagreed with the notion put forth in the above-mentioned question. In total, 62.7% of those surveyed in Lofa were in disagreement or unsure of the outcome. Similarly, 27.1% of participants in Bong County strongly disagreed with the claim.

6. Conclusions

Research demonstrates that the public has seen marked improvement in the LNP since reform began in 2008. Generally positive perceptions of the relationship between the LNP and the community are a welcome development. However, attention must be paid to the status of the LNP in Bong and Lofa counties, both of which had responses that were markedly more pessimistic than those in other parts of the country. Continued perceptions of corruption are also highly problematic, especially given that such problems will most likely only be exacerbated as the UN leaves and the LNP loses a critical accountability mechanism.

Liberia has made much-lauded strides in the wake of its civil war. However, these recent successes have been predicated on UNMIL's support. UN technical advisers help the government strategize and budget and, importantly, UN Peacekeepers created a stable environment in which economic growth surpassed five percent last year. Notably, the LNP has been completely dependent on UNMIL to bankroll and supervise its reform efforts as well as to provide necessary logistical capacity. As UNMIL withdraws, Liberians will lose their safety net and there is cause for concern that the government will be unable to fill the void. Before the drawdown begins in 2011, the Liberian government must take a frank look at its role in SSR. It must identify its weaknesses and invest the time and energy in putting in place the necessary protocols to ensure accountability. Attention must be paid to ensure adequate budgets, benchmark development, leadership qualifications and effective recruitment strategies. Such efforts are confounded by the high costs associated with training and overseeing an effective police force as well as the difficult political navigations inherent in ensuring quality leadership at the highest levels. However, nothing is more important for Liberia's continued growth.

APPENDIX: FOCUS GROUP SUMMARIES

LOFA COUNTY

Lofa County shares borders with Sierra Leone and Guinea and was the site of mass violence last February, which pitted the region's Christian and Muslim populations against one another in the wake of the tragic death of a young student and killed nine people in Voinjama City.

In Lofa County, focus group participants uniformly castigated the police for its corruption and lack of community engagement. And while differences existed between views expressed in the three sessions, there was consensus around the need for further reform in anticipation of the UNMIL drawdown.

Focus Group #1

Cohort: Youth

Location: Zor Zor

Date: July 14

The seven young people who discussed the LNP with Search were all high school students critical of both the police and the judicial system in Lofa, which they viewed as a single system. The current relationship between the LNP and the community was described as "zigzag." Further discussions pinpointed several improvements to the LNP since reform began, but highlighted myriad remaining problems that compromise citizens' safety.

Improvements in the wake of reform included a reduced crime rate – which students attributed to the LNP – as well as closed borders and better observation of national holidays. Students also praised the women and children protection section of the LNP as "very effective." They stated that this section "does not run away" from perpetrators of violence.

The group was in agreement, however, that difficulties remain. Corruption remains rampant. Armed robbery is still a threat, and students felt strongly that the police are unable to respond to serious crimes because officers themselves fear criminals. One student went so far as to say, "Police are fearful of the community." There was consensus that one of the major reasons for this fear is the fact that police officers are not armed. Students also noted that police officers constantly ask for bribes and will throw people in jail without cause. They stated furthermore that the officers refuse to disclose the reason for your arrest or your rights when you are being detained despite the fact that they are required by law to do so. Young people had heard of several

instances where youths were put in jail with adults, instead of being separated from the general population as required by law.

When discussing how the community could work to improve relations with the police, students highlighted the misunderstanding in the community regarding the role of the police in the judicial process. Under Liberian law, if someone is put in jail and not charged, he or she must be released after 48 hours. When the community sees that criminals are back on the streets, the police are blamed instead of the judicial system that has ultimate authority over prisoner release. Students noted that this disconnect could be a result of a lack of education as well as the fact that the police are the most visible part of the justice system.

Students in Lofa agreed that the LNP remains completely dependent on UNMIL, especially for transportation and other logistical support. Students noted that UNMIL vehicles were necessary if the LNP responded to incidents but did not believe the LNP has the skills to maintain a fleet of vehicles if they were provided to them.

When discussing actions that could improve the LNP, students placed responsibility on both the community and the LNP to improve conditions and develop mutual respect. Students called on the public to learn more about their rights and Liberia's new laws while noting that the police should be better trained in conflict mediation skills. Discussants praised the work of the Carter Center, which has undertaken an information campaign to educate the community about transitional justice and their rights, however, many believed even more should be done. Students also recommended that police be held accountable for unethical behavior and breaches of protocol and asked generally for additional training.

When asked about what can be done to keep the peace, students were adamant that the government must take the security sector seriously and intervene to strengthen the LNP. They also noted that jobs were a crucially important way to get young people off the streets and to increase safety.

Focus Group #2

Cohort: Christian Women

Location: Voinjama

Date: July 15

The seven Christian women brought together to discuss the LNP provided a comparatively more pessimistic view of the community/police relationship. There was consensus that the reform process has not brought any improvement to the police. Explaining the reform process, one participant noted that the LNP may look on the outside like a new car, but the "same engine" as before is driving the LNP. Several women noted that UNMIL were "the only people" that the community could depend on.

Women vociferously criticized the unprofessional behavior of police officers while out and about in the community. They noted that community interactions with the police were limited to shake downs and bribes and that police are only guided by their own self-interest. Furthermore, the group agreed that the police were only visible when they were breaking protocol or drinking at the community pawnshop or video club. Several women noted that they had seen officers drunk while in uniform. According to one woman there is “nothing on (officers’) minds but smoking, drinking and taking drugs.” Women highlighted a highly disturbing trend of police officers accepting bribes from arrested criminals and then releasing them to roam the streets freely at night. They also noted that police officers routinely released prisoners to run errands for officers on duty.

Participants strengthened their argument regarding police corruption and incompetence by discussing specific incidents. One of the participants narrated a recent experience she had with the police after her daughter had been harassed while walking home. When the discussant went to the police station to report the case, she was forced to pay more than \$3,000 LD out of pocket for police services. Despite this expense, nothing came of the woman’s claim. Another participant described an especially disturbing incident between an Emergency Response Unit (ERU) officers dispatched from Monrovia to help quell February’s mass violence. Several other women noted that they had heard about the case, which involved an ERU officer using drugs and then arresting and breaking the arm of Lofa resident over a personal dispute.^{xiv} The culture of impunity demonstrated in the lack of response to this incident was highly worrisome to the group.

Women had a generally negative impression of the region’s women and children protection section, which they noted was made up of one single female officer who did not make her presence known in the community. They noted that there was a group of homeless children who had been organized by a predator to beg during the day and return any profits to him every evening and that despite almost universal knowledge of the situation within the community, the LNP has taken no action to stop the exploitation.

Several women compared the current LNP to the police force under previous Liberian governments. Participants noted that officers working under President Samuel Doe were much more effective than the current LNP and the LNP under Charles Taylor. They believed that the police under Doe were generally smarter and better trained despite the fact that they also sometimes turned to bribery.

During discussions of how to improve the relationship between the police and the community, women offered several recommendations. They noted that the community does a poor job of alerting commanders of indiscretions. Despite the fear of possible negative repercussions, participants noted that the community should always make grievances known. Participants were also in agreement that the community should band

together and refuse to pay bribes. Several women advocated bringing back older, more experienced officers who had been forced out of the LNP due to their dealings with the previous government. Some believed that these better quality, experienced officers, could act as productive mentors to younger, more inexperienced officers who seem to be quickly learning the bad habits of the remaining leadership. The need for improved LNP training was also noted. The most frequent recommendation was the development of some sort of community network, which could act as a safety net for victims and facilitation police interaction with the community.^{xv} One participant, who had spent time in Nigeria, advocated developing a mechanism similar to what she had seen there. None of the participants was aware of Lofa's Community Policing Forum.

When asked the more general question, "What can be done to keep the police?" respondents agreed that justice was absolutely necessary to maintain peace and stability. They noted further that the law must be abided and "stand for justice." Women worried that increased violence remains in the wake of the February violence. They believe strongly that it would only take a small spark to re-ignite violence, which they feared could easily grow more deadly than the recent events.

Focus Group #3

Cohort: Muslim men

Location: Voinjama

Date: July 16

The group of Muslim men Search interviewed in Voinjama further substantiated many of the complaints voiced by women and youth in the region. However, they were more optimistic about the LNP's ability to react to small disputes brought to officers' attention.

When discussing the relationship between the community and the police, the men assembled echoed many criticisms that had been voiced in the two previous focus groups. They decried what they believed to be a largely corrupt police force that is not interested in working with the community. Furthermore, like the women interviewed, they believed that crime was organized and supported by the police and were specific in highlighted issues at the border, where they believe officials knowingly allow criminals into Liberia to prey on communities near the border such as Voinjama. They noted that police routinely steal from the community with impunity and that officers have been known to arrest community members simply attempting to keep the peace in their neighborhood. There was general consensus that police are aware of criminality and do not act to apprehend law-breakers. When discussing the relationship, one participant that intimidation was so awful that "(Liberians) are not free."

Participants noted that the tense relationship between the community and police has been exacerbated by the LNP's opacity and poor community outreach. Discussants noted that the police do not associate with the community. Several men stated that

police refrain from interacting with community members. Participants noted that the only times they see police vehicles on the streets black tinted windows prevent any interactions between officers and the community. This was used as a prime example of the police/civilian relationship. The Lofa County police commander was singled out for his anti-social behavior, with participants noting the community has no access to him and that his behavior sets a bad example for those working under him.^{xvi}

Another major complaint was that the police are not proactive. Discussants noted that unless a complaint it made, police were content to standby and watch as laws were violated. And while the participants did believe that police respond adequately well to small claims brought to their attention in which they do not have a personal stake – a position that women interviewed generally did not share – they worried that police do not have the capability to respond to violence. Men and women also had differing views of the Women and Children’s Protection Section. While women interviewed were not happy with that unit’s performance, men thought that when a woman carries a complaint to that unit, it will be responding to fairly quickly. When asked about UNMIL’s role in maintaining security, men noted that the Pakistani and Bangladeshi UNMIL presence in the region was absolutely necessary to combat violence.^{xvii}

The group responded to an inquiry about how best to prepare for the UNMIL drawdown by focusing on improved police training. They noted that police need to carry weapons in order to be able to adequately protect themselves and the community but that additional training and better teaching was needed to provide officers with the skills to safely carry arms. They also noted that there needed to be additional police officers stationed in Lofa County.^{xviii} Several men agreed with those women who asked that former LNP officials who had worked under previous administrations be brought back to the force to act as mentors for younger officer. Men furthermore believed strongly that the police organize regular meetings with the community. Those interviewed insinuated that such meetings would be more effective at improving the dialogue between the community and the police than the Community Policing Forums set-up by the government. Although those interviewed were aware of this Community Policing Forum, they did not think it was making a difference and did not seem interested in participating. The men were more knowledgeable about the Forum than the women and children consulted. No one in either of those Focus Groups was aware that Lofa County had such a forum and responded in the negative when asked if one existed.

When discussing how best to keep the peace, the men focused on what the community can do. Youth education was a crucial recommendation, as was “(loving) one another” and avoiding tribalism. One participant focused on his work bringing together Muslim and Christian leaders to facilitate communication across ethnic lines. All participants believed strongly in better Rule of Law, which they said brings Justice. They were pessimistic about current tensions, which they believed were quite high. Many agreed with the statement of one discussant “Justice is not strong.”

MONTSERRADO COUNTY

Search for Common Ground undertook five focus groups in Montserrat County between July 30 and August 2, 2010. Discussions took place in the following communities: South Beach, Rehab, Freeport, New Kru Town, and Gaza. Each focus group consisted of seven participants – three women, two men, and two youths.^{xix} Four of the five communities visited (the exception being South Beach) were comparatively more optimistic about the current state of the civilian-LNP relationship than regions up-country. However, responses varied greatly. Each group highlighted several ways conditions could be improved and discussed recent events that underlined the continued corruption and mismanagement within the LNP's ranks. Below are summaries from each of the five discussions as well as a set of conclusions based on the discussions.

Focus Group #1

Location: South Beach Community

Date: July 31, 2010

Participants in the South Beach focus group discussion were the most pessimistic about the general relationship between the LNP and the community of all the Montserrat communities visited. They described the overall relationship as “not good” and “problematic.” Participants noted that their community was especially vulnerable to rape and robbery, citing a recent incident in which wires used for electricity were stolen in the middle of the afternoon. Several believed strongly that the “police (are) the primary cause of crime.”^{xx} Community members admitted to using “self-interrogation” and mob justice when the police are unresponsive, which they complained was the case the vast majority of the time.

Several discussants are active members of the South Beach Community Policing Forum. In describing how their forum functions, they highlighted its role as an information sharing mechanism that facilitates communication with the police. However, in the opinion of focus group participants, the LNP officers in the community are not working constructively with the Community Policing Forum, which they noted was indicative of the LNP's generally negative and lackadaisical attitude. A telling example of the difficulties in the current LNP-Community relationship is the fact that the community routinely calls upon the AFL to take criminals into custody. Soldiers are willing to bypass the LNP because of personal relationships with community members.

Participants agreed with the statement put forth by one discussant that LNP officers can be bribed to arrest most anyone without cause. There was concern that a cycle of violence and mistrust has been created that the police had primarily caused. The women and children's protection section was singled out as outside of this cycle, mostly, according to the group, as a result of the section's Director, who discussants believed

was engaged with the community and who took the time to make her presence known throughout South Beach.

Participants noted that the LNP has improved since 2008. However, the only units that the specifically cited as better behaved when not under UNMIL's watchful eye were the Emergency Response Units (ERUs) and the Police Support Units (PSUs). The rest of the LNP were better behaved, they said, when UNMIL personnel were watching over them. When UNMIL was not present, there was no perceived improvement.

When asked how the LNP could be improved, participants focused on improved salaries and logistical capacity. However, participants were weary that simply providing motorbikes, fuel and other provisions would solve the problem. They pointed to the new mobile phones provided to the LNP working in South Beach, which the LNP demanded but have not improved LNP capacity in their view.

Participants reflected on their negative view of the police while responding to questions about how to keep the peace. They noted that despite their difficult relationship and the corruption, "the police are not the enemy." Instead, their pessimistic views are based on the LNP's poor response to crime. Furthermore, they asked for continued empowerment of community-based organizations and demanded that LNP (as well as security personnel generally) have access to older mentors, many of whom had worked for former regimes and had therefore been forced out through the vetting process.

Focus Group #2

Location: Rehab Community

Date: July 31, 2010

Like those in South Beach, Rehab discussants were primarily concerned about the LNP's corruption and dilatory tendencies. Drug-related crimes occurred at a particularly high rate and discussants believed that the LNP preferred taking bribes from drug dealing criminals to arrests offenders: a phenomenon they in part attributed to the fact that the LNP does not carry guns.

Discussion participants noted that a disturbing trend of civilians not bringing complaints to government authorities out of fear of retribution. Because criminals will most likely quickly released back into the community if they are apprehended at all, the logic goes; many believe that they should not discuss crimes committed against them. Communities are small and the criminal will know who made the complaint and will want to retaliate.

There was general agreement that the development of a new LNP since 2008 did weed out bad apples that had perpetrated human rights violations. However, participants agreed that the pre-reform LNP was more mature and had a much better understanding of the community than the current force.

Gender based violence was a difficulty in the community that participants believed the LNP dealt with well when cases were brought to their attention. Discussants noted that additional education was needed to teach the community to bring complaints to the LNP. Rehab's most recent GBV case involved a 35-year-old man who had been sleeping with a 12-year-old girl. The group agreed that the case was being handled well by the police.

One of the discussants that worked with the South Beach Community Policing Forum noted that he and a group of other community members went to police leadership to ask how best to increase LNP accountability and ensure that officers are punished for problematic behavior. They were advised to take photographs of LNP officers misbehaving. Participants were highly skeptical, however, that the pictures would make a difference and furthermore were doubtful that they would ever have the cameras and other tools needed to combat the LNP.

There were divisions within the group regarding recommendations for LNP improvement. Several people advocated arming the police so that they would not be afraid to respond to armed criminals. A vocal minority, however, rejected that advice, noting that the police would have to be much better trained in order to make providing them guns a prudent course of action. All discussants asked that more money be used to provide LNP officers with necessary transportation.

Focus Group #3

Location: Gaza Community

Date: August 4, 2010

Those taking part in the Gaza Community focus group prefaced their discussion by emphasizing the lack of crime in their newly developed community. They noted that they have yet to have any problems with the LNP, and trusted LNP officers and are always sure to be proactive in any dealings with LNP officials. LNP officials were called "peacemakers" and elders in the community happily noted that LNP officers consult them about any problems, which in Gaza were generally domestic violence claims.

Discussants criticized Liberia's justice system, which they noted was inferior to those in Francophone Africa. One participant noted that if you are not willing to pay LNP officers to testify on your behalf, officers are not advocates within the judicial system.

Respondents worried that Liberia's unemployed youth could become an even greater threat as UNMIL leaves. They asked the government to provide funds to ensure that former fighters without jobs have livelihoods in the future.

Focus Group #4

Location: Freeport Community

Date: August 2, 2010

Freeport Community has historically suffered from an extremely high crime rate. However, there has been a drastic decline in violence in the last few years. Focus group participants attributed the drop to an improved LNP presence in the Community. Discussants were optimistic about the trajectory and current status of the relationship between the police and the LNP, noting that they are a constructive and constant presence in the community. During the Focus Group Discussion, Search researchers witnessed LNP officers patrolling on foot, something they have not witnessed in any other community in Liberia.

The community lauded the LNP depot that was recently built in the community. The presence of this station ensures that the LNP can respond quickly to complaints. Furthermore, participants believed strongly that the LNP was dedicated to engaging with the community, especially the Community Policing Forum, to support continued cordial relations. As an example of the constructive relationship, discussants noted that senior LNP officers at the Freeport depot provided their cell phone numbers to the community for use to lodge any complaints.

Despite their praise of the LNP, Focus Group participants had a negative view of the Court System, to which they attributed the release of criminals back onto the streets. This interpretation of the Court's role in the Justice system was unique to Freeport. Other communities blamed the LNP for releasing criminals who then threaten the civilians they believe had them arrested.

Despite their praise of the LNP, the community remains concerned about what will happen as UNMIL begins to drawdown. Focus Group Participants were keenly aware that UNMIL personnel are a constant presence at the LNP Freeport depot. Several discussants worried that the LNP will report to corruption and unethical behavior in the absence of UNMIL oversight. One man noted that he believes that when UNMIL leaves "People who are working with us today" will be working against us tomorrow. It is important to note that there was a group of participants who through their commentary insinuated that they believed that even with the UNMIL drawdown there will be an international presence within the LNP indefinitely and that such a presence was necessary.

Focus Group #5

Location: New Kru Town

Date: August 2, 2010

Discussants in New Kru town focused their comments on the changes in the LNP since reform began in 2008. They noted that the current relationship between the police and the community had its ups and downs, but that they were satisfied with the progress

being made. Their satisfaction was mostly derived from the precipitous drop in the crime rate, which they attributed to the new LNP.

The Focus Group agreed that the current LNP was “85-90% better” than it had been previously. They noted that the LNP makes sure to let you know your rights when you are being apprehended, which never occurred previously. However, participants noted that because officials recruited an entirely new force, the current LNP lacks the maturity of previous iterations of the police, who were less educated. Furthermore, there were complaints that the LNP continues to constantly demand bribes. The group agreed that high-level LNP leadership has been well trained and is not corrupt, but that corruption remains within the LNP’s lower levels.

Echoing a common complaint, the group noted that the LNP fears responding to armed criminals because they themselves do not carry arms. They noted that the LNP quickly responds to fist fights, fights with bottles and other makeshift weapons as well as accidents, but that their response time was much slower when responding to armed robberies or similar crimes. They also noted that a central phone number that could be used to report cases would be useful for community members.

When asked what could be done to keep the peace, the group focused on developing mutual respect within the community as well as the LNP responsibility to act ethically and use the training provided to them by UNMIL and the international community. Discussants asked for additional workshops and empowerment initiatives to lay strong foundations for future progress and noted that the LNP must remain disciplined as UNMIL leaves in order for peace to remain constant.

BONG COUNTY

In surveys conducted by Search in five counties throughout Monrovia, Bong County participants had the most negative view of LNP performance. Participants cited the lack of meaningful oversight and rampant corruption as the major causes of the difficult civilian/police relationship.

Gbarnga, Bong County Focus Group #1

Cohort: Men

Date: August 11, 2010

Men in Bong County worried about the number of officers in the county, which they estimated to be between forty and fifty.^{xxi} They were adamant that more officers were necessary.

Discussants called the women and children protection unit “very effective” and noted that UNMIL personnel were deeply engaged in supporting the unit. Comparatively, they

worried that the LNP has no capacity to respond to mob violence or any crimes in which arms were involved. Instead, they noted that the community was completely reliant on UNPOL as well as the battalion of Nigerian Farm Police stationed in the county to respond to threatening cases. They did not trust the police to respond to any instances in which civilians were in danger of bodily harm.

Participants asked that ERU officers be stationed permanently in Bong County. ERU officers responded to a recent incident in Bong Mines, and discussants noted that they were much more effective than ordinary officers. There was consensus that ERU officers would fill gaps that will be left when UNPOL leaves.

When asked to offer recommendations about how to improve the relationship between the police and the community, participants noted that Liberians needed to take charge and take their destiny in their own hands. One discussant noted that “(Liberians) always want everything free,” and that they “can’t depend on the UN” and must therefore “take initiative” to ensure their own security.

Gbarnga, Bong County Focus Group #2

Cohort: Women

Date: August 11, 2010

Women in Bong County began the focus group by highlighting the high levels of violence throughout Bong County. They noted that the only officers they see on the street are traffic officers who set-up checkpoints along the road on market days in order to force the community to pay bribes. Furthermore, several of the focus group participants who lived outside of Bong’s capital, Gbarnga, noted that there is no LNP presence in their community and that when crime occurs in their community there is no one who responds.

Discussants believed that the LNP had no capacity to respond to armed violence. They noted that UNPOL and the Nigerian Farm Police are the only entities in Bong County that can stop widespread armed violence. Despite their knowledge of UNPOL’s presence in the county, they noted that they did not see UNPOL in LNP depots regularly and believed that they simply made quick stops to ask questions and check on record keeping.

Women recommended that officials strictly adhere to the high school graduation officer recruitment requirement. Furthermore, they asked that Community Policing Forums be developed since they had not heard of any such mechanism in the community.^{xxii}

NIMBA COUNTY

Ganta, Nimba County Focus Group

Location: Ganta, Nimba County

Date: August 12, 2010

In Ganta, the 14 men and women who participated in Search's focus group were highly critical of the LNP while underlining their desire to improve relations between the police and the community. They saw the impact of LNP training and praised those "good eggs" whose dedication to combating corruption provided crucial support to community leaders. However, in the absence of logistical support and meaningful accountability mechanisms, focus group participants offered stories of rampant corruption and inefficacy similar to those offered by other communities throughout the country. They also noted that citizens fear making claims because they assume that criminals will quickly return to the streets and target victims for reprisal attacks.

A large portion of the discussion focused around violence against women and children in the community. International NGOs are supporting the LNP's women and children's protection unit in Ganta by providing funds for officer transportation and other administrative costs. However, these funds do nothing to build capacity in the long-term and are not available for armed robbery and many other serious crimes that do not fall under Gender-based violence. Although happy with the funds provided by the international community, participants were unhappy with the behavior of the women and children's protection unit, which they noted frequently talked women out of making domestic violence claims against their partners. According to civil society leaders taking part in the discussion, officers warned women that they would not be able to support themselves and their children without their partner.

According to focus group participants, UNMIL's daily visits to LNP depots are a necessary component of the LNP's improved behavior. Although not embedded with LNP depots, UNPOL officials meet with LNP officers each morning to check records and ask questions about pending cases. Without the UN presence, community members worried that the LNP will quickly degenerate. As evidence, one focus group participant noted that LNP officers acting without UN oversight during dealings with uninformed community members would not abide by the law. They are aware they are breaking protocol, but believe that they will not face any penalty for their misbehavior and therefore prey on uninformed citizenry.

The group recommended that UNMIL empower civil society to act as a check on police misbehavior in anticipation of the UN drawdown. They also noted that a Community Policing Forum, which no one in the group believed to be present in Nimba, would be a useful way to increase communication. Although government authorities told Search researchers that civil society and community leadership is engaged at the Count-level through regular consultation meetings, focus group participants and CSOs in Ganta

dismissed this claim, noting that the only meaningful dialoguing that took place with local government were a few ad-hoc meetings organized by the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

List of Key Informant Interviewees:

Center for Law Enforcement of Liberia
Mr. Cecil Griffith

Press Union of Liberia
Mr. Peter Quaqua

West Africa Peace-building Network
Ms. Lindora Howard Diawara

Transitional Justice Working Group
Mr. James Yarsiah

Catholic Justice and Peace Commission
Cllr. Augustine Toe

Federation of Liberian Youth
Mr. Augustine Zayzay

International Center for Transitional Justice
Mr. Aaron Weah

UNPOL Commander
Gautam Sawang

UN SSR Advisory
Mr. Rori Keane

City Mayor of Lofa County

Deputy Commander of LNP in Lofa County

Deputy Mayor of Nimba County

Police Commander, Nimba County

Nimba women and children protection section (LNP)

Bong County liaison officer

Leader of Nimba Concerned Women Association

LNP Deputy Inspector General for Administration
Col. Samuel Dakana

United Nations Development Programme
Mr. Napoleon Abdulai

LNP Commander for Bong County

UNMIL Sector B Civil Affairs officer

Notes and references

ⁱ March-May 2010, UN Focus, pg. 5

ⁱⁱ SSR Network, "A Beginners Guide to Security Sector Reform (SSR)," Global Facilitation Network for Security Sector Reform (gfn.ssr), Dec. 2007. http://www.ssrnetwork.net/documents/GFN-SSR_A_Beginners_Guide_to_SSR_v2.pdf, accessed Jun 27, 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ Herbert Wulf, "Security sector reform in development and transitional countries" in *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*, Dialogue Series, no. 2 (2004), <http://www.berghof-handbook.net/dialogue-series/no.-2-security-sector-reform>.

^{iv} Department for International Development (DFID), UK, "Security and Justice Sector Reform Programming in Africa", Evaluation Working Paper no. 23, April 2007, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/evaluation/sjr.pdf>, accessed June 19, 2010.

^v *ibid*

^{vi} Alan Bryden, "Security Sector Governance in West Africa: Turning Principles to Practice", Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Policy Paper No. 8 (2005), <http://www.dcaf.ch/Publications/Security-Sector-Governance-in-West-Africa>, accessed July 23, 2010.

^{vii} Commissioner Sawang Mtg.

^{viii} Jake Sherman. "Strengthening Security Sector Governance in West Africa" Center on International Cooperation. New York University, March 2009. Available at: <http://reliefweb.int/report/liberia/strengthening-security-sector-governance-west-africa>

^{ix} Laurie Nathan. "Local Ownership of Security Sector Reform: A Guide for Donors," UK Global Conflict Prevention Pool, Jan. 2007, <http://www.crisisstates.com/download/others/SSRReformNathan2007.pdf>

^x Alix Boucher, "National Security Strategy Note", Stimson Center, 12 Dec 2009, <http://ebookbrowse.com/stimson-national-security-strategy-note-final-12dec09-pdf-d121988113>

^{xi} Search for Common Ground Meeting with UNPOL Police Commissioner Gautam Sawang Meeting.

^{xii} UN Focus March-May 2010, pg. 5

^{xiii} Women in Lofa County were the exception to this rule. All focus group participants in that group believed strongly that each and every officer was ineffectual, generally drunk and corrupt.

^{xiv} Much lauded by the UN and US, ERU officers are meant to act as elite members of the LNP, comparable to American SWAT teams. The 344 men and women who make up the ERU force underwent extensive training and, unlike the vast majority of the LNP, carry weapons. Based in Monrovia, ERU officers were sent to Lofa via UNMIL helicopters to help calm the mobs in Lofa in February.

^{xv} Several counties in Liberia have Community Policing Forums, which are organized to improve the relationship to the LNP.

^{xvi} The Lofa County Superintendent was quick to defend the Commander when confronted with the community's thoughts and comments. The Superintendent noted that although the Commander's demeanor was generally reserved, he was very open and available to the public and that he played football weekly with community members.

^{xvii} Although it was not discussed explicitly during focus group discussions, the religious connection between the Muslim UNMIL personnel and Muslim Madingo population in Lofa was noted by several members of the Voinjama community as a difficulty. Although most Christians Search spoke with praised UNMIL, an alarming number believed that they side with Lofa's Muslim population during disputes, and did so while working to stop the violence in February.

^{xviii} The Deputy Police Commander strongly shares this view. He noted that the department in Lofa had put in a request to increase the number of officers in the region from roughly 140 to 250.

^{xix} This format differs from the organizations structure Search used during for discussions undertaken upcountry, which divided participants based on religion and gender.

^{xx} This is a direct quote, although by the end of the discussion, it was clear that he meant this statement more to mean that the LNP colludes with criminals and is corrupt and not that the LNP actively robs and rapes.

^{xxi} LNP officials in the county put the figure at 105

^{xxii} LNP and UNDP officials note that a Community Policing Forum has been set-up in Bong County. However, Search staff spoke with local Zone leaders responsible for implementing the forums who noted that they were not functioning due to lack of resources.