

CONTEXT

Description of originating project:

The Context of the Research

Given the limitations of size and skills of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), their decimation during the civil war and their increased responsibilities following the departure of UNAMSIL forces December 2005, the government of Sierra Leone is seeking to mobilise citizens to play a role in keeping law and order. Citizen-led crime-prevention groups, known as Police Local Partnership Boards (PLPB), were introduced from 1999 as part of the adoption by the SLP of the concept of community policing, known in Sierra Leone as Local Needs Policing. They are chaired by a civilian body and include representatives of the significant groups and interests in the locality.

Earlier research by the lead researcher in 2005 found that The Minister of the Interior had received complaints that some PLPB are ineffective and are failing to meet regularly. On the other hand, one Freetown PLPB was found to have already provided information that had led to the arrest of 'hard core' criminals and had begun to identify drug centres (Baker, 2005). Beyond being providers of intelligence, the PLPB are meant to give local communities a say in how they want to be policed. Yet preliminary research found the SLP were taking all the initiative in this area. It appeared that there was a conflict of agendas between the SLP on the one hand and Ministry of Interior/Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Programme advisers on the other. Given the potential of PLPB for improving the public attitude towards the SLP and of enhancing security in the fragile post-conflict environment, it was seen as important to understand how they are actually functioning. This was all the more important since in Africa 'outside South Africa, we have no ... detailed critique of ... community policing. Official praise for that imported policing strategy has not ... been countered by much empirical examination of its reality' (Brogden, 2004). Existing evaluations of community policing in Africa only number a handful (For Kenya: Ruteere and Pommerolle, 2003; for South Africa: Scharf, 2000; Pelser et al, 1999; and more broadly: Brogden, 2004).

The Research Objectives

The aim of the research was to understand how the PLPB in Sierra Leone function; what they achieved; and how they related to the local community and the SLP.

The objectives were to establish:

To what degree were the PLPB representative of the local community (were they primarily the local business or socio-economic elite) and how were they selected?

To what degree were the goals actually being pursued by the PLPB, SLP set goals or community set goals?

What hindrances were there to the sustainability of the PLPB?

What types of intelligence were the PLPB providing the SLP and how did the SLP evaluate its utility?

What benefits had been brought about by the PLPB in terms of crime prevention in the eyes of the community, the PLPB and the SLP?

What variation was there between local PLPBs and what were the possible reasons for these variations.

Methodology and Research Programme

In research undertaken in February 2005 by both researchers in Sierra Leone the PLPB were briefly investigated and contacts made with SLP LUC, Community Liaison Officers and PLPB members. This present fieldwork built on and extended those contacts and investigated this form of community participation in policing more thoroughly. The research was conducted over two working weeks. It was primarily semi-structured interviews held in 4 PLPB. For each PLPB the PLPB committee and members, and the SLP Local Unit Commander and Community Officer were interviewed. Each community was approached through a focus group for each PLPB area.

End of award report:

Account of research carried out

The research was carried out smoothly in September 2006, thanks in large part to the preparation made before hand by the collaborating researcher, Mr Amadu Sidi Bah of the Campaign for Good Governance, Freetown. The four police divisions of Freetown all have functioning Police Partnership Boards and so all four divisional Local Unit Commanders (LUC) and their community policing officers were interviewed, as were the chairmen and executives of the Police Local Partnership Boards. In addition, focus groups were held in four divisions to gain some understanding of local perceptions. A report based on the data collected has been sent to the Inspector General of Police, the 4 LUC, the PLPB Chairmen and all those interviewed who asked for a copy.

The advances in knowledge and understanding resulting from the research

Until this current research, there has been no known published research on the practice of community policing in any sub-Saharan country outside of South Africa. The research established when (1999) and why (DFID/Commonwealth initiative) community policing was begun and how it was established and the changes that have taken place as it has developed.

It was found that some of the original intentions of community participation, namely setting the local police agenda and priorities, have not been fulfilled nor was the participation in police promotions boards continued for long. In both cases the police resisted these innovations.

In the main the PLPBs consist of civic-minded enthusiastic local activists and, contrary to some critical thought concerning community policing, showed little evidence of being exploited by local political elites for the purpose of promoting political ambitions. Nevertheless it was found that the PLPB primarily consisted of the educated and/or traditional elites of the community and though there were elections for the PLPB, it was one of confirming an already existing local community leadership (including 'youth' leadership). In this sense their composition was not fully representative of all classes of their communities.

The research found that knowledge of PLPBs and appreciation of them varied considerably. In some areas, largely due to the 'sensitisation' campaigns of PLPB activists, it was well known and appreciated; in other areas its activity was unknown.

In every police division it was apparent that the community formed the senior partner in terms of labour, energy, enthusiasm and funding. Whilst the police appreciated the facilitating of crime investigation and the supply of crime intelligence, there was little practical contribution on their part to enabling the partnership. In some cases there were joint patrols, but in other divisions these were seen as 'unhelpful'. Despite the police preoccupation with other matters, the achievements of PLPB were

considerable in terms of reporting, investigating crime and even resolving social disorder. The PLPB might have only a minimal input into policing goals for the local areas, but they did pursue goals that represented popular wishes such as campaigning against school violence, achieving the removal of 'pirate ghettos' along the quayside or the formation of their own Neighbourhood Watch patrols (where the police were reluctant to engage in PLPB-police joint patrols). They also acted as a pressure group upon the Inspector General of Police to secure extra resources for their division (e.g. vehicles; repair of buildings) or to secure promotion or dismissal of officers.

The chief hindrance to the sustainability of the PLPB was lack of financial assistance, even to cover items such as small refreshments at PLPB executive meetings and of lack of premises outside the divisional police station. With almost all the resources being supplied by the PLPB themselves, there was a danger that voluntarism might run its course.

The police readily acknowledged that the PLPB provided them with invaluable information that they had no ability to acquire themselves, although the intelligence was interspersed with trivia and the seeking of personal favours. It necessitated the SLP in a screening of the information that came to them through the PLPB. The outcome, nevertheless, was that in the opinion of both the PLPB and the police, the partnership had succeeded in reducing most crimes and made crime more difficult to commit successfully.

In as much as there was variation between local PLPBs, this was largely due to the enthusiasm of individual PLPB activists and the commitment of the local community officer.

The research confirmed that the PLPB and community policing is not simply a foreign idea imposed upon police and communities from outside. There are practical problems of a police force that only gives community policing minimal attention in terms of facilitating the PLPBs, but neither the police nor the communities would be without the partnership. Communication between communities and the police not only provides information for the police to solve crime and the public to protect itself against crime; it is also establishing a new respect between the two parties. Each now acknowledges their dependence on the other and of the other's ability to serve them.

STRUCTURE OF THE DATA SET

1. Sierra Leone Police Force

interviews

LUC Vincent Nabieu, C Division; LUC Amadu Mannah, B Division; LUC S. B. Kargbo, A Division; Spt. S. R. Marka, D Division and deputy LUC.

2. Police Local Partnership Board members

interviews

21 members of the divisional & zonal executive of C Division (18 males & 3 females).
8 members of the divisional & zonal executive of B Division (7 males & 1 female).
Hannah Gillam, executive member of the divisional executive of C Division.
Chairman of A Division PLPB, Chief Gbarom Matthew-Young.
10 members of the executive of D Division.

Chairman of C Division PLPB.

3. Citizens

focus groups

B Division 13 persons (13 male youths).

D Division 12 persons (5 women, 7 men; 6 youths, 6 adults)

A division 7 youths (5 men, 2 women)

C division 29 persons (25 men, 4 women; 28 youth, 1 adult)