



Norwegian Institute  
of International  
Affairs

# Extending State Authority in Liberia

## The Gbarnga Justice and Security Hub

Marina Caparini



**NUPI Report**  
[Report no. 5, 2014]

---

**Publisher:** Norwegian Institute of International Affairs  
**Copyright:** © Norwegian Institute of International Affairs 2014  
**ISSN:** 1894-650X

Any views expressed in this publication are those of the author. They should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. The text may not be printed in part or in full without the permission of the author.

**Visiting address:** C.J. Hambros plass 2d  
**Address:** P.O. Box 8159 Dep.  
NO-0033 Oslo, Norway  
**Internet:** [www.nupi.no](http://www.nupi.no)  
**E-mail:** [info@nupi.no](mailto:info@nupi.no)  
**Fax:** [+ 47] 22 99 40 50  
**Tel:** [+ 47] 22 99 40 00

---

# Extending State Authority in Liberia

## The Gbarnga Justice and Security Hub

Marina Caparini

Norwegian Institute of International Affairs  
June 2014

# Contents

Executive Summary .....	4
Acknowledgement.....	8
Acronyms .....	9
I. Context.....	10
Background .....	11
State Security and Justice Provision in Liberia .....	12
Law Enforcement and Public Security .....	12
Border Management .....	17
Justice System.....	17
Security and Justice for Women and Children.....	19
The ‘Justice and Security Hubs’ initiative .....	20
Gbarnga Justice and Security Hub .....	21
Five Hypotheses Underlying the Gbarnga Hub.....	23
II. Research Findings.....	25
Law Enforcement and Public Security .....	25
Border Management .....	32
Access to justice .....	34
Corrections and rehabilitation.....	39
Security and Justice for Women and Children .....	42
III. Conclusions .....	46
Assessment.....	46
Recommendations.....	50

# Executive Summary

This report examines the establishment of the first regional justice and security hub near Gbarnga, Liberia. By building up law enforcement and justice capacities in the outlying regions, the hub represents a joint effort by the Government of Liberia and the UN Peacebuilding Fund to extend Liberian state authority. The context for this pilot initiative is that Liberian police and justice services have a weak presence outside the capital city of Monrovia and will increasingly bear sole responsibility for safety and security as the UN Mission in Liberia draws down its forces with a view to eventual withdrawal.

Forward-basing of PSU at the Gbarnga hub has brought benefits to the region – faster armed response to public order incidents and increased visibility of police in the outlying regions through outreach activities linked to confidence patrols. These benefits nevertheless remain limited by resource constraints, in particular the lack of adequate means of transportation. While co-location has enabled the lending of vehicles by the BPU to the PSU on occasion, this does not resolve the fundamental problem of a critical gap in their means of mobility. Under-resourcing is even more severe for regular LNP located at depots throughout the three counties, and the imposition of user ‘fees’ or petty corruption is rife. Public perceptions in the Gbarnga region seemed generally sympathetic to the police, with a seemingly broad understanding that regular LNP are not paid enough to cover basic living costs, nor receive the resources to perform their professional functions as they are supposed to. Low pay and various professional disincentives further dissuade LNP from accepting deployment to the leeward, while better conditions in the elite PSU and ERU units attract qualified regular LNP. While the hub has raised rapid response policing capacity and extended the state’s authority through the PSU, systemic budgeting shortfalls forms the backdrop and sets narrow boundaries not only to those achievements, but to the ability of regular LNP working at depots throughout the three counties to perform their functions.

The hub offers several benefits for building Liberia’s border management capacities, namely improving response times for security incident response at the border through forward deployment, providing dormitory accommodation for the BPU officers, and enabling the sharing of the BPU’s two vehicles with other hub-based units, and in particular the PSU when required. Nevertheless, the stationing of the BPU at the hub reduces but does not fully resolve the problem of distance and logistics; the BPUs at the Gbarnga hub remain centralised inland from the border, rather than being dispersed in close proximity

to the border. Original planning for the Gbarnga hub expected that BPU at the hub would benefit from co-location with other law enforcement officers at the hub through enabling information and intelligence sharing. This argument for co-locating the BPU with PSU and other services at the hub appears weak in the current context when weighed against the advantages of improving service delivery – surveillance patrolling and security incident response – through locating BPUs closer to the border. More benefits would appear to be offered through co-location at the border itself. Future hubs will not likely host BPU, which will be located closer to or at the border.

The court complex was not yet complete and few justice-related services were being provided from the hub when field research was undertaken. However concerns were raised about the distance of the Gbarnga hub from Gbarnga city, and the logistical difficulties that would be posed for those needing to appear at the magisterial and circuit courts as well as for other justice and security providers who would interact with the courts, including the Gbarnga regional prison and regular LNP. While building formal justice capacity is urgently needed, it is also clear that these efforts will be constrained by the systemic dysfunctions that continue to afflict the formal justice system. Under-staffed, under-resourced, with excessively short court terms, resulting in overloaded court dockets, huge backlogs of cases and very low number of cases being heard, the formal justice process is slow and expensive for those pursuing cases through the courts, and its vulnerability to corruption favours those who are able to pay. Given these conditions, it is to be expected that the majority of Liberians will continue to resort to customary or traditional justice when possible.

Although it is offsite from the hub, the Gbarnga prison is connected to the justice and security services located there. The prison is viewed as well-run and having improved conditions for prisoners. Several improvements seem to be linked to the hub initiative as well as good management. Insufficient court capacity and backlogs in the criminal justice process have produced a very high rate of pre-trial detention in Liberia, applying to around 78% of prison inmates. Nevertheless, this situation has improved in the Gbarnga prison, seemingly as a result of the introduction of fast-track court proceedings to release suspects whose pre-trial detention time has exceeded the legal limit. The decline may also be due to the introduction of probation for minor and first time offences. The hub initiative has also resulted in the building of a new medical clinic at the Gbarnga prison, a very positive development in view of the lack of adequate transportation to transfer ill inmates to hospital. Nevertheless, a continuing risk is posed by the lack of transportation for detainees between court and the prison, whether the court is based in Gbarnga city, or eventually in the hub.

In terms of improving justice and security for women and children, the Gbarnga hub hosts the regional office of the Sexual and Gender

Based Violence (SGBV) Crime Unit, part of the prosecution arm of the Ministry of Justice. The unit works closely with the LNP's WACPS and prosecutors, and also seeks to provide psycho-social support to victims of sexual violence. While its location at the hub will facilitate coordination with prosecutors and other justice personnel involved in the prosecution of SGBV cases, the SGBV Crime Unit must also venture outside the hub to collect information about SGBV incidents to build cases for prosecution. Although reliant on having adequate logistical capacity, the unit's one vehicle was not functioning at the time of research. While various NGOs and UNMIL contingents have helped fill logistical gaps in the past, these avenues of assistance are declining with UNMIL drawdown. Although not based at the hub, regular LNP who have been trained to handle SGVV cases and work in the specialised WACPS units are closely linked to the activities and effectiveness of hub actors seeking to improve women and children's justice and security. WACPS officers face challenges through a high departure rate linked to low pay and better professional prospects in the PSU and ERU.

Whether co-location of key justice and security providers at the Gbarnga hub will enhance collaboration to improve service delivery remains to be proven. Centralising services in a highly under-served region may bring more disadvantages than benefits, particularly when the extremely challenging issue of logistics are considered, for both clients and providers of justice and security services. The hub has achieved some deconcentration of justice and security personnel from Monrovia and a somewhat stronger physical presence of the Liberian state in the leeward, but deeper decentralisation appears to be some ways off. While complaints now are easier to register for the public, the mechanism does not necessarily have any bearing on whether accountability mechanisms for justice and security actors are considered effective. Impact of the hub on local community groups and NGOs is not yet evident, and more needs to be done in publicising the functions and services offered at the hub.

Planning for future hubs should incorporate the lessons learned from the Gbarnga hub. This appears to have been the case in the new prioritisation of service delivery in subsequent hubs. Just as important, future hubs should reflect the needs and priorities of local communities as well as local justice and security service providers. Baseline perception surveys should be undertaken well in advance of planning, which should involve truly inclusive processes. Regular monitoring and impact assessment should be undertaken as all planned services begin operating from the hub, particularly in terms of the effects of co-location. Further, in view of the de facto coexistence of both formal and traditional/customary justice providers, more effort to coordinate and harmonise state building efforts related to the future hubs with traditional/customary justice providers could be undertaken. Finally, work on future hubs must be undertaken in tandem with efforts to

address the resource gaps, lack of capacity, bottlenecks and vulnerability to corruption in the formal justice and security system, and to do so in a way that is sustainable with long-term commitment of government funding.



# Acknowledgement

This report presents findings from a research trip undertaken in June 2013 to Monrovia and Gbarnga, Bong County, Liberia. The research team was comprised of Marina Caparini, Kari Marie Kjellstad, and Trine Nikolaisen. The Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' *Training for Peace Programme* generously provided support for this report.

I would like to thank all those who contributed to the research by giving generously of their time and sharing information and perceptions about security and justice delivery in Liberia. I would also like to thank John Karlsrud, Kari Osland, Kari Marie Kjellstad, Alwin Nijholt, Kristoffer Nilaus Tarp, and Franzisca Zanker for their comments on an earlier version of this report.

Portions of the report were presented at NUPI's Challenges of Peacebuilding in Liberia Seminar, Oslo; the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Toronto; and the Inclusivity in Peacebuilding Workshop, Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, Uppsala. I thank all of the organizers and participants in these meetings for the opportunity to present this research and for their useful comments on it.

This publication and others on peacekeeping and peacebuilding in Africa can be found at: [www.nupi.no](http://www.nupi.no) and <http://trainingforpeace.org>

# Acronyms

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
BIN	Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization
BPU	Border Patrol Unit
CLA	Community Liaison Assistant
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ERU	Emergency Response Unit
FPU	Formed Police Unit
LNP	Liberia National Police
NDP	National Decentralization Policy
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PBF	Peacebuilding Fund
PBC	Peacebuilding Commission
PBSO	Peacebuilding Support Office
PSU	Police Support Unit
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
SWAT	Special Weapons and Tactics
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNPOL	United Nations Police
VSO	Victim Support Officer

# I. Context

This report examines a recent effort to improve the delivery of critical public goods to outlying communities in Liberia. Due to lingering devastation wrought by the extended 14-year civil war and a historical tendency to concentrate state resources and infrastructure in the capital city of Monrovia at the expense of the hinterland, delivery of public services to Liberia's outlying regions or 'leeward' is deficient, and in many places practically non-existent. This weakness in public service delivery is particularly the case with state policing and criminal justice, two of the most fundamental and defining functions of the modern state.

The project examined here, a joint initiative by the Government of Liberia and the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), seeks to build up the capacity of Liberian state actors to provide public security and improve access to justice for people living in outlying areas through the creation of regional 'justice and security hubs'. The gradual drawdown and eventual withdrawal of the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has served as a trigger for the build-up of state justice and security services. The development of policing capacities is aimed at enabling the Liberian state to assume full responsibility for internal security tasks hitherto performed by UNMIL. The hub initiative acknowledges the close link between state police and the formal justice system, and reflects the understanding that efforts to increase state policing capacities must necessarily also address relevant actors and mechanisms in the justice sector in order to be effective. The hub initiative has emphasised the enhancement of service delivery to communities outside the centre through the 'decentralisation' of personnel and assets from Monrovia and a move towards greater inclusiveness and accountability in public service delivery for Liberians who live in under-served regions.

Field research was undertaken in June 2013 in Gbarnga (Bong County) and in Monrovia. Interviews were conducted in Monrovia with relevant UN and Government of Liberia officials, and in Gbarnga and its environs with hub personnel, local justice and security providers, UNMIL personnel, representatives of Gbarnga area community groups and civil society organisations, and with inhabitants of several communities surrounding the hub. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather information, perceptions and expectations of stakeholders and local actors. As the hub was only partially completed at the time of the field research and the hub was not yet fully functional, this report will concentrate primarily on those services that

were being delivered at the time of our visit – i.e. the delivery of public safety (security) and maintenance of order.

In this report, I will first present the background and context of the effort to improve state-delivered justice and security services in Liberia. I will then examine findings of the field research concerning the Gbarnga hub. I conclude with an assessment as to whether the Gbarnga hub is meeting its intended objectives, and recommendations for future efforts in extension of state authority and improvement of justice and security in Liberia.

## **Background**

Liberia is a post-conflict state still recovering from 14 years of civil war that occurred in two phases, the first from 1989 until 1996, and the second from 1999 to 2003. As a result of the conflict, an estimated 250,000 people had been killed and nearly one million displaced out of a pre-war population of nearly three million. Many women and children were conscripted into militias, and rape occurred widely during the war, against civilians and combatants. The extended conflict shattered the economy and infrastructure of Liberia, and ended most governmental activities and public services.<sup>1</sup>

Following the August 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), a National Transitional Government of Liberia was appointed until democratic elections were held in October 2005 and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected President, then re-elected in 2011. Sirleaf has presided over the reconstruction and state-building process, facilitated by a large international presence. The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was established in October 2003, absorbing the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) peacekeeping force that had preceded it, and at one point constituted the largest UN peacekeeping mission to be deployed with an authorized force of 15,000 military personnel and 1,115 police officers. UNMIL has played a major role in Liberia's post-war stabilization and reconstruction, but today UNMIL is undergoing a transition in which it is drawing down its forces and progressively handing over security tasks hitherto performed by its uniformed personnel to local authorities.<sup>2</sup> Between 2007 and 2010 UNMIL reduced from 15,000 to 7,952 troops (of which 1,375 were police).<sup>3</sup> In 2012 the UN Security Council decided to reduce military strength further to 3,750 troops by July 2015, though

---

<sup>1</sup> Republic of Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume I: Preliminary Findings and Recommendations, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2066 (2012).

<sup>3</sup> UNSCR 2066 (2012), para 5. See also UNMIL page on UN website, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmil/facts.shtml>, last accessed 10 May 2014.

augmenting the mission by additional UN police including 3 additional Formed Police Units (FPUs) to assist with the transition.<sup>4</sup> Current total authorised strength of the police contingent is 1,795, consisting of up to 10 FPUs and UN Police (UNPOL) advisers.<sup>5</sup>

A major challenge to transition and the building of Liberian state capacity to provide public security is that Liberia remains one of the world's poorest countries; in 2012, 83.8% of its people fell below the international poverty line of having an income at or above USD \$1.25/per day.<sup>6</sup> Liberia continues to have a highly centralised state, and corruption is pervasive to the extent that Liberia is considered one of the most corrupt states according to global corruption rankings.<sup>7</sup> And yet there are signs of improvement. The country is generally stable, although recent unrest in neighbouring Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire has had some reverberations especially in the border region. And while Liberia ranks below average in Africa and in the West African sub-region in terms of governance indicators, Liberia was recently named as the African state that had experienced the most improvement in overall governance since 2000, with its biggest improvement in the area of public safety and rule of law.<sup>8</sup>

## State Security and Justice Provision in Liberia

### Law Enforcement and Public Security

The key state actors and institutions responsible for delivering justice and security throughout the country have undergone significant efforts to restructure and build capacity since the end of the civil war. The Liberian police faced daunting challenges in the immediate post-war period in terms of both personnel and resources. When UNMIL arrived in 2003, they found few Liberian police remaining in their positions, and of those who were still working, many lacked basic qualifications or were believed to be linked to rebel groups. To create the new Liberia National Police (LNP), all existing police were deactivated and were allowed to apply to join the new police, undergo vetting, and if accepted, undergo basic training. Out of almost 3,000 police officers who had registered to join the new police, only 756 remained after

---

<sup>4</sup> UNSCR 2066 (2012) and Jennifer Lazuta, 'UN takes next steps in drawdown of military presence in Liberia', *Voice of America News* (online), 15 January 2013.

<sup>5</sup> UNSCR 2066 (2012).

<sup>6</sup> World Bank, 'World Development Indicators 2012', Washington, D.C.: World Bank. <http://data.worldbank.org>. <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>. Last accessed 10 May 2014

<sup>7</sup> Transparency International, *Global Corruption Barometer 2013*, 'Liberia'.

<sup>8</sup> Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 'Liberia "most improved" in Ibrahim Index of African Governance', Press Release, 14 October 2013.

undergoing vetting.<sup>9</sup> The initial vetting procedure aimed to identify and disqualify those who were over 55 years of age, had failed to meet the minimum educational qualifications, or were found to have committed human rights abuses.<sup>10</sup> The vetting procedure was criticized on various and sometimes contradictory grounds. Many police were angered by the requirement that all officers who wanted to continue working for the new LNP had to re-apply for their positions, as they felt their experience was not valued. At the same time civil society actors criticised the vetting process for failing to be conducted with sufficient rigour, or enabling individuals with questionable human rights records to return to the police despite having been vetted.<sup>11</sup> Other critics maintained that the vetting procedure removed too many experienced police and left it bereft of knowledgeable police personnel, and allowed recruitment of individuals who did not meet the minimum conditions, especially in terms of education.<sup>12</sup> With insufficient numbers of police for the size of the country (see below), a shortage of middle-management expertise, low morale internally among the poorly paid recruits, and continued lack of public confidence as a legacy of the war years and the perceived flaws in the vetting procedure, the LNP in the immediate post-war years were unable to adequately ensure public security or maintain public order.

In this context UNMIL's military and police contingents, Formed Police Units, have been based at locations throughout Liberia to provide support to the LNP and Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN), which have lacked the capacity to contend with public disorder involving ten or more persons.<sup>13</sup> They have also made a significant contribution to strengthening public perceptions of security in the country through their presence and patrols since 2003. For

- 
- <sup>9</sup> Jonathan (Yoni) Friedman and Christine MacAuley, 'Building Civilian Police Capacity: Post-Conflict Liberia, 2003-2011', *Innovations for Successful Societies*, Princeton University, 2011, <http://www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties/content/focusareas/PL/policynotes/view.xml?id=176>. Last accessed 5 May 2014.
- <sup>10</sup> Friedman and MacAuley, 2011. See also Bruce Baker, 'A policing partnership for post-war Africa? Lessons from Liberia and southern Sudan', *Policing and Society*, Vol. 19, Issue 4 (2009), p. 375.
- <sup>11</sup> Mark Malan, *Security Sector Reform in Liberia: Mixed Results from Humble Beginnings* (Carlisle, Penn: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2008), 50-51.
- <sup>12</sup> Thembanani Mbadlanyana and Freedom C. Onuoha, 'Peacekeeping and Post-Conflict Criminality: Challenges to the (re)establishment of rule of law in Liberia', ISS Paper 190, (June 2009), p. 14. International Crisis Group, 'Liberia: Uneven Progress in Security Sector Reform', Africa Report No. 148 (13 January 2009), p. 17.
- <sup>13</sup> Peacebuilding Fund, 'Quick Start for Liberia Priority Plan II (2011-13)', 12 November 2010. Available at: [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/projects/LBR/00061292\\_PB%20Quick\\_Start\\_Project.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/projects/LBR/00061292_PB%20Quick_Start_Project.pdf), last accessed 5 May 2014.

example, 94% of respondents in a 2006 survey stated that the security situation had improved under UNMIL.<sup>14</sup> A more recent survey published in 2010 found that 93% of respondents felt more secure through the physical presence of UNMIL contingents compared to the time before they had arrived, and that UNMIL enjoyed a high level of legitimacy as a security provider among Liberians living in communities where UNMIL forces were deployed, with 65% seeing UNMIL as the primary security provider against armed groups.<sup>15</sup>

While the United States assumed the lead for Liberia's armed forces reform, Liberian police reform was led by UNMIL. Part of UNMIL's original mandate was monitoring and restructuring the Liberian police, helping to develop a civilian police training programme, and assisting in training the civilian police.<sup>16</sup> Since 2003 United Nations Police (UNPOL) serving in UNMIL has directly contributed to the rebuilding of the Liberian National Police. UNPOL advisers provide advice and mentoring to LNP and BIN officers through co-location with counterparts and by providing training at the National Police Training Academy. UNPOL contingents have filled public security gaps through their presence and patrols. FPUs are armed police units who are tasked with public order management, protection of UN personnel and facilities, and assist with higher-risk police operations.<sup>17</sup> In Liberia, in addition to conducting joint patrols with LNP, and providing operational support to the LNP when necessary during instances of public disorder, FPUs have engaged in community outreach activities to help build public confidence in police.<sup>18</sup>

The LNP does not yet have a comprehensive and effective presence throughout Liberia. In January 2013, LNP strength was reported at 4,200 officers, translating into a police/citizen ratio of 1: 683.<sup>19</sup> By February 2014, police strength stood at 4,573 officers, and there was a severe backlog of over 1,000 police recruits awaiting basic training at

---

<sup>14</sup> Jean Krasno, *Public Opinion Survey of UNMIL's Work in Liberia* (New York: UN Peacekeeping Best Practices Section, March 2006), p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Eric Mvukiyehe and Cyrus Samii, 'Quantitative Impact Evaluation of the United Nations Mission in Liberia: Final Report', 9 February 2010, pp. 11-12.

<sup>16</sup> UN Security Council, Resolution 1509 (2003), para 3 (n).

<sup>17</sup> Annika S. Hansen, 'Policing the Peace: The Rise of United Nations Formed Police Units', ZIF Policy Briefing, May 2011.

<sup>18</sup> UNMIL webpage, <http://unmil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=3959&language=en-US>. Last accessed 10 May 2014.

<sup>19</sup> World Bank and UNMIL, 'Liberia Public Expenditure Review Note: Meeting the Challenges of the UNMIL Security Transition', Report No. 71009-LR, January 2013, January 2013.

the police training academy.<sup>20</sup> Current strength remains well under the 8,000 estimated to be necessary to properly maintain public security for the current Liberian population of over 4 million once the UN Mission in Liberia draws down and withdraws its military and police contingents.<sup>21</sup> This figure is based on a United Nations guideline that recommends on average one police officer per every 450 citizens. Various considerations may influence that ratio, however, such as the country's road network, geography, policing model, mobility and communications capacity, crime rate, fiscal conditions and informal policing mechanisms. In Liberia, where the road network is poor and police have extremely limited mobility and communications, an estimated police-to-citizen ratio of 1:500 is considered a minimum.<sup>22</sup> Figures from a 2010 study indicate that Bong County, with some 102 LNP personnel dispersed across ten police stations or posts, had a police-to-citizen ratio of 1: 3300.<sup>23</sup>

LNP in the outlying regions (also referred to as 'up country' or 'the leeward') are severely under-resourced and face operational and logistical challenges. Perhaps the most significant challenge to the ability of the LNP to carry out its duties is its lack of sufficient vehicles and mobility, which given the challenging terrain of Liberia, particularly in the rainy season, seriously constrains the capacity of the police to respond promptly and effectively to crime and disorder. As previous studies have found, in addition to vehicles, LNP in the periphery also lack radio communications, electricity, equipment and basic office supplies.<sup>24</sup>

The low numbers of police in the countryside and their inadequate means of mobility is a fundamental gap in police capacity which weakens the claims of the state to be the legitimate provider of security and public order. Self-organised policing initiatives, such as neighbourhood watch groups and village/community patrols have emerged in the absence of effective state policing presence and high crime rates. Although these local initiatives can be positive phenomena there is also potential for abuses.<sup>25</sup> Further, frequent incidents of mob

---

<sup>20</sup> UN Security Council, 'Twenty-seventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia', S/2014/123, 18 February 2014, para 41.

<sup>21</sup> Estimate of required police in Liberia cited by UNDP representative in Winston Parley, 'UNDP Worries on Security', *The New Dawn* (Monrovia), 24 June 2013. The latest population figure for Liberia is 4.1 million in 2012, provided by the World Bank. See: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>

<sup>22</sup> World Bank and UNMIL, 'Liberia Public Expenditure Review Note', p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Reeve with Jackson Speare, *Security and Justice from a County Perspective: Bong County, Liberia*, International Alert (November 2010), p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> Baker, p. 375.

<sup>25</sup> Ana Kantor and Mariam Persson, *Understanding Vigilantism: Informal Security Providers and Security Sector Reform in Liberia*, Folke Berndotte Academy, pp. 21-29.



violence and vigilante justice in Liberia demonstrate that local police are not trusted to provide community safety and order to local inhabitants. Growing frequency of mob violence spurred UNMIL to embark in 2014 on a year-long public awareness campaign against mob violence.<sup>26</sup> Weak police presence, slow response due to lack of mobility, and problems of the wider criminal justice system reinforce popular perceptions that police allow criminals to walk free.

Regular LNP officers – until very recently – have been unarmed.<sup>27</sup> To deal more effectively with serious organised violence and civil disorder, two specialised units within the LNP were established that both carry arms. The Emergency Response Unit (ERU), numbering over 312 officers,<sup>28</sup> is composed of elite Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams that are highly trained, heavily armed and mandated to use lethal force in order to deal with organised armed threats. The ERU have been primarily funded, equipped and trained by the United States. At the time of field research in June 2013, ERU were deployed close to the border with Cote d'Ivoire along with Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and BIN personnel in response to recent instability and cross-border incidents.

The other armed police unit in the LNP is the Police Support Unit (PSU), a standby force that provides a rapid, armed response to regular LNP requests for assistance in instances of civil unrest and breakdown of public order. PSU provide backup, support and crowd control, usually in response to small incidents of disorder, such as unruly demonstrations, as well as in cases of riots and civil unrest. PSU officers receive six months of training in riot policing and hostage situations to this end. By February 2014 the PSU had achieved personnel strength of 1005 officers.<sup>29</sup> Until the Gbarnga hub was established, all PSU were deployed from Monrovia to respond to LNP requests for assistance throughout the country.

---

<sup>26</sup> A 44% increase in incidents of mob violence in Liberia was reported from January to September 2013. See <http://unmil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=5521&language=en-US>, last accessed 10 May 2014.

<sup>27</sup> In April 2014, in reaction to the continuing inability of police to respond to crime at night and increasing incidents of mob violence directed at police, Director of Police Chris Massaquoi announced the decision to arm police at every police station in every district of Liberia. See Winston W. Parley, 'Liberia: Police to be Armed at Depots', *The New Dawn* (Monrovia), 9 April 2014, on AllAfrica.com.

<sup>28</sup> Figure from UNMIL website. <http://unmil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=3959&language=en-US>, last accessed 10 May 2014.

<sup>29</sup> UN Security Council, 'Twenty-seventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia', S/2014/123, 18 February 2014, para 41.

### **Border Management**

Liberia has a 1,500 kilometre long ‘green’ (land) border that includes 176 border entry points, including an estimated 130 unofficial crossing points. The three counties served by the Gbarnga hub – Lofa, Bong and Nimba – all have external land border control responsibilities, sharing borders with Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire. Border posts are few and far between, typically have poor infrastructure and lack electricity, and are understaffed by border management personnel. In 2010, for example, Lofa County had 90 Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) officers to serve 18 official border posts in addition to two key internal highway checkpoints, and dozens of unofficial border crossings. The county lacked any armed Liberian security personnel, and in the event of security threats, had to rely either on ERU to be deployed from Monrovia, which was about a 9 hour drive to Voinjama (in dry weather conditions), or on UNMIL military, FPU and police contingents.<sup>30</sup>

Border management appears to be lagging behind other areas of security sector reform in Liberia. As of January 2013 BIN personnel numbered fewer than 2000 officers, and reportedly among those ‘many are not qualified and some are eligible for retirement.’<sup>31</sup> Strengthening that capacity is essential in the context of UNMIL drawdown and reduced patrols, increasing Liberia’s vulnerability to smuggling and cross-border theft, as well as intermittent periods of volatility and instability in neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea. To that end, BIN has set out a target of increasing its personnel strength to 3500 by 2017, and of fully arming its Border Patrol Unit.<sup>32</sup> While Liberia continues to lack state capacity to effectively manage its external borders, there have been some improvements: in 2012 security personnel were stationed at only 36 official border crossings throughout Liberia; by 2014 this has been increased to 45 manned border crossings. The BIN has the declared aim of manning 15 additional border crossings each year.<sup>33</sup>

### **Justice System**

Liberia’s formal justice system contains severe capacity gaps in the form of insufficient prosecutors, public defenders, judges, and overloaded court dockets that contribute to the very slow progression of court cases through the formal justice system. Investigators and

---

<sup>30</sup> Reeve with Speare, ‘Lofa County’, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> World Bank and UN Mission in Liberia, ‘Liberia Public Expenditure Review Note’, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> ‘250 BIN Recruits Begin Training Today’ in *New Liberia*, 7 August 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Karno, ‘National Security Gets US \$86M As Justice Minister Leads Defense of Budget’, Front Page, Africaonline, 10 August 2012; and Alvin Worzi, ‘BIN Commissioner Visits Lofa’s Borders’, *Daily Observer* (Monrovia), 15 April 2014.

prosecutors face resource constraints in following up cases, conducting proper investigations, and mounting effective prosecutions, especially in remote areas. Poor road conditions, communications and coordination impair the use of witnesses during hearings<sup>34</sup>. There are often long delays before a case will come before a judge, if ever. Suspects are typically detained for long periods before appearing before a judge; in 2013 an estimated 80% of Liberia's prison population was awaiting trial.<sup>35</sup> This saw a slight improvement by 2014 when 75% of the prison population was in pre-trial detention.<sup>36</sup> The 130 day limit on how long a suspect can be held in pre-trial is frequently exceeded, with the result that suspects often spend 2-3 years in detention.<sup>37</sup>

For the high proportion of impoverished Liberians residing in rural areas, the absence of legal aid and the imposition of fees for the registering of court cases and for their progress through the justice system, constitute significant disincentives to using the formal justice system. The justice system is also considered highly vulnerable to corruption, and many cases are dropped either by police or at the magisterial court level through bribing of officials by alleged perpetrators.<sup>38</sup>

While this report focuses on the Liberian state's effort to extend state justice and security services, it is essential to recall the prominence of the traditional sector for the majority of the population, and the de facto hybrid nature of justice and security. In Liberia, as is the case in many sub-Saharan African countries, traditional, customary and informal justice providers are the predominant and preferred route for the resolution of disputes in most rural communities. Customary authorities may include the hierarchy of chiefs, elders, and religious leaders. Traditional authorities in some areas also include the secret societies – Poro and Sande, as well as Masons for the rich and powerful.<sup>39</sup> Customary and traditional justice mechanisms are, compared to the formal justice system, faster, more affordable for the

---

<sup>34</sup> Government of Liberia and UN Joint Programme on Sexual and Gender Based Violence, *In-depth Study on Reasons for High Incidence of Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Liberia: Recommendations on Prevention and Response*, October 2011, p. 52.

<sup>35</sup> Amnesty International, 'Liberia', *Annual Report 2013*, 23 May 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Karin Lundgren, SRSG and Co-ordinator of UN Operations in Liberia, Briefing to the Security Council, 20 March 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Ricci Shryock, 'Prisoners in Liberia often wait years before seeing a courtroom', VOA News, 21 September 2010.

<sup>38</sup> Government of Liberia and UN, 'In-depth Study', p. 52.

<sup>39</sup> Deborah Isser, Stephen Lubkemann, Saah N'Tow, *Looking for Justice: Liberian Experiences with and Perceptions of Local Justice Options*, Peaceworks No. 63 (USIP, 2009).

average citizen, and more relevant to the social and cultural contexts of many Liberian communities. Their drawbacks are linked to the traditional values that reflect a highly patriarchal system, and which tend to treat victims of sexual and gender based violence according to rigid traditional gender norms.<sup>40</sup>

### **Security and Justice for Women and Children**

Liberian women and children face particular security and justice challenges. Sexual and gender-based violence occurred widely during the civil war; many women and children were conscripted into militias, and rape was widespread against both civilians and combatants.<sup>41</sup> Sexual and gender-based violence continues at an elevated rate in contemporary Liberia.<sup>42</sup> Yet, relatively few perpetrators are brought to justice and face trial in the formal criminal justice system. A substantial number of SGBV cases – over one-third of reported SGBV cases in 2010 – are not forwarded by the LNP to magisterial or circuit court, whether due to the resource challenges of investigating and prosecuting such crimes, inability of victims to pay fees to access the criminal justice system, logistical constraints on witness notification and travel, poor record keeping and lack of coordination between elements in the criminal justice sector, or corruption.<sup>43</sup>

In April, the Monrovia WACPS investigated 143 cases, of which 25 went to court and 64 cases were withdrawn.<sup>44</sup> According to a recent public survey, the overwhelming majority of rape cases in the Gbarnga region are believed to be carried out someone in close proximity to the victim – that is by people believed to be a friend of the family living in the community (36.8%), immediate relatives staying in the same house as the victim (21%), family members living in the community (16%) or

---

<sup>40</sup> Government of Liberia and UN, 'In-depth Study', pp. 51-52.

<sup>41</sup> A survey conducted in 1998 found that 49% of Liberian women and girls reported experiencing at least one incident of physical or sexual violence by a combatant. See Shana Swiss et al, 'Violence Against Women in the Liberian Civil Conflict', *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, Letter from Monrovia, Vol. 279, No. 8 (1998): 625-629. A more comprehensive 2008 sampling survey that addressed the prevalence of sexual violence during the war found that 33% of respondents had spent time as combatants, and 33% of those were female. Of the 33% female former combatants, most had experienced sexual violence. See Kirsten Johnsen, et al, 'Association of Combatant Status and Sexual Violence with Health and Mental Health Outcomes in Postconflict Liberia', *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 300, No. 6 (2008), 676-690.

<sup>42</sup> Small Arms Survey, 'Peace without Security: Violence against Women and Girls in Liberia', Issue Brief, No. 3 (September 2012), p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Government of Liberia and UN, 'In-depth Study', p. 52.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Alieu M. Bility, Unit Officer, Women and Children Protection Service, Liberia National Police Headquarters, Monrovia, 18 June 2013

the father (8%).<sup>45</sup> The same study found that family members are often not willing to testify when a rape case goes to court because the accused is a family member, to avoid shaming the family, and to protect the victim from stigma and shame.<sup>46</sup>

The Liberian state has accepted that both customary and formal justice are part of the Liberian justice system, and is attempting to send a clear message to customary justice providers such as town chiefs that cases of SGBV are criminal matters that are beyond their jurisdiction and that must be dealt with by the LNP and formal justice system. However, the reality of life in Liberia is that there are multiple factors that continue to lead people to prefer the customary system and to avoid pursuing cases in the formal system. As established in the baseline study, there is a very high level of ignorance about the formal justice system. There is also an issue of victims not having information about the legal process. People in the outlying areas also tend to view immediate police actions, such as investigation, arrest and pre-trial detention of a suspect, as a form of justice.

As discussed above, many victims lack the resources necessary to see a court case through to its end in the formal justice system, and especially in the countryside, victims are counselled to eventually accept some form of restorative justice as mediated through the community (NGOs, community based organisations, local women's groups). Due to the long processing times and the financial challenges of seeing a court case through, many victims and victims' families cannot afford the costs (of transportation, fees, etc.), time or the emotional strain, especially when children are involved, to pursue the case in the formal justice system. A victim may also be offered reparations by the perpetrator or his family, and if she accepts such compensation would drop the charges against the accused.

### **The 'Justice and Security Hubs' initiative**

The hub concept evolved from a proposal originally advanced by the Liberian National Police to develop regional command centres as forward operating bases in the countryside. In late 2010 the United Nations and the Government of Liberia decided to establish five regional hubs, each responsible for three counties, which would host an array of actors in the justice and security sectors. The development of the hubs would be undertaken with the objective of pursuing a 'balanced strengthening' of institutions in each sector – law

---

<sup>45</sup> Search for Common Ground for the SGBV Crimes Unit, *Baseline Study on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Indicators in Bong, Lofa and Nimba Counties*, Ministry of Justice, August 2012, pp. 1-3.

<sup>46</sup> Search for Common Ground, *Baseline Study on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Indicators*, p. 2.

enforcement, the courts, state prosecution and defence, and corrections – both in terms of capacity and infrastructure.<sup>47</sup> The hubs would be aimed at enhancing the provision of justice and security through a decentralised and holistic service delivery approach, including ‘the enhancement of linkages between these institutions; and the development of relationships between the institutions and the communities they serve.’<sup>48</sup> The hubs would also serve as a means by which national agencies could better provide effective security in preparation for UNMIL’s transition and the progressive transfer of security functions to national authorities.

The establishment of five regional justice and security hubs throughout Liberia is being undertaken with the financial support of the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and the assistance of the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO). Each hub was projected to cost around US \$3 million for infrastructure, and an additional \$1 million to ‘enhance services, deployment and outreach’.<sup>49</sup> The Peacebuilding Fund agreed to provide US \$13.3 million for all five hubs, financing the first hub in Gbarnga and seeking co-financing from donors for the remaining four hubs. As noted in February 2013 by Judy Cheng-Hopkins, the United Nations Assistant Secretary General for Peacebuilding, the PBF’s support to the hubs initiative, has been the most ambitious project undertaken by the Fund so far.<sup>50</sup>

### **Gbarnga Justice and Security Hub**

The location of the pilot hub was identified as Gbarnga, the capital of Bong County. The Gbarnga hub is supposed to serve the populations of the three contiguous counties of Bong, Lofa and Nimba, which in the last census from 2008 had a combined population of over one million people out of a Liberian total 3.5 million, and which collectively encompass a territory spanning 31,779 square kilometres, or nearly one-third of Liberia’s total area. The selection of Gbarnga as the location for the pilot hub was a strategic decision, as the three counties affected are considered ‘conflict prone’.<sup>51</sup> The three counties also share borders with the states of Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone. Because of the region’s size and proximity to zones of instability, the hub in Gbarnga was determined to have the potential to make a more significant and immediate impact on security and justice delivery for more people than hubs in other regions.

---

<sup>47</sup> Rory Keane, ‘Reviewing the Justice and Security Hub Modality as Piloted in Liberia: Can It Work and Can It be Applied Elsewhere?’, *Stability*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2012), p. 88.

<sup>48</sup> Peacebuilding Priority Plan, January 2011, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> World Bank and UNMIL, ‘Liberia Public Expenditure Review Note’.

<sup>50</sup> Executive Mansion, ‘Liberia Unveils First of Five Regional Justice and Security Hubs in Gbarnga’ [Press Release], 14 February 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Keane, p. 90, n4.

The Gbarnga hub is located five kilometres from the city of Gbarnga, which had a population of over 34,000 according to the 2008 census. An unpaved road links the hub with Gbarnga city. The hub is being constructed on an 18-acre plot of land that was provided by the Government of Liberia. The hub will host a magisterial court, circuit court, Police Support Unit, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Crimes Unit, Border Protection Unit of the Border and Immigration Service, Probation Officers, corrections officers having court-related responsibilities, human rights monitors and a Public Outreach Office. The infrastructure includes a courthouse complex with housing for judges, an administrative building, women's and men's dormitories for officers of the PSU, dormitories for the BPU officers, a PSU training centre, and offices for the SGBV Crime Unit, a Public Outreach Office, and a probation service. Gbarnga prison is located off-site, two kilometres from the hub on the same road leading into the city.

Ten services were operating from the Gbarnga hub at the time of field interviews in June 2013, out of a planned total of fourteen when the hub becomes fully operational. Some services are supposed to be based at the hub itself, such as the Public Outreach Office and its mechanism for receiving complaints about justice and security actors and referring them on to relevant mechanisms and bodies. Other services that will eventually be offered at the hub will revolve around the courthouse that will be built in the hub, including the judges, prosecutors and public defenders. Some court-related services will involve service delivery to end users outside the hub, such as those involving case officers, probation services and the SGBV Crime Unit, comprised of lawyers, victim support officers and people trained to investigate SGBV cases but not including regular LNP. The SGBV Crime Unit provides services in coordination with a local hospital and makes referrals to community-based organisations. There are also services that are expected to operate from the hub, that is, with personnel and offices and housing being based at the hub but with personnel going into the community to provide the service. These include the PSU, which provide backup for local police stations throughout the three counties, and BPU which conduct surveillance patrols at the borders.

The construction of the first hub was initiated in 2010, with the objective that it would become operational by July 2012. However, construction encountered repeated delays and problems, and by early 2013 the cost of the not yet completed hub had risen to \$5.3 million.<sup>52</sup> While the Gbarnga hub was formally opened in February 2013, the infrastructure was not yet complete nor was the hub fully operational when field research for this study was undertaken in mid-2013. At that time, construction of the courthouse, some dormitories and the

---

<sup>52</sup> Executive Mansion, 'Liberia Unveils First of Five Regional Justice and Security Hubs in Gbarnga'.

perimeter fence were yet to be completed.<sup>53</sup> Most justice-related services were not yet operating from the hub.

### **Five Hypotheses Underlying the Gbarnga Hub**

According to the Justice and Security Joint Programme Managers at the Ministry of Justice, five working hypotheses underpinned the original concept of the justice and security hubs in the Liberian Peacebuilding Programme.<sup>54</sup> These hypotheses apply to the pilot hub built in Gbarnga, although it was noted that they could be revised for the subsequent hubs. First, and most ambitiously, it was expected that collocating justice and security personnel in the hub would enhance collaboration and coordination to provide better services. Further, by being deployed in one central location, economies of scale could be achieved through the sharing or rationalisation of certain resources.<sup>55</sup>

The second hypothesis held that the hub would facilitate the decentralisation of justice and security services from Monrovia to the leeward regions, initially by sending more people out to the region to provide these services. Since independence, Liberia has had a highly centralised state. Decentralisation is a stated objective of the current government. The National Decentralization Policy (NDP) was approved in late 2009 by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and her cabinet, released in June 2011, and launched in January 2012. The NDP aims to achieve political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation. Conceived after nation-wide consultations, and acknowledging the serious capacity gaps at both national and local levels, the decentralisation process began with the allocation of resources from the national budget to county administrations to implement local development policies, and with line ministries in Monrovia beginning to deconcentrate functions through the transfer of personnel from Monrovia to the outlying regions.<sup>56</sup> The pilot hub was thus intended to contribute to Liberia's long-term goal of decentralising public service delivery through the extension of state justice and security personnel into the hub's area of responsibility, i.e., Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties.

The third hypothesis held that that the hub – its infrastructure, personnel and service delivery – would strengthen the physical presence of the Liberian state in the outlying regions, and through that

---

<sup>53</sup> Interview with J. Hezekiah Slakor, Manager of Gbarnga Regional Justice and Security Hub, 19 June 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Paula Barragan and Joyce Cassell-Frankfort, National Program Managers, Justice and Security Joint Program, Ministry of Justice, Monrovia, 17 June 2013.

<sup>55</sup> Keane, p. 88.

<sup>56</sup> Government of Liberia and UNDP, *LDLD News on Decentralization & Local Development*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January 2012).



presence would help to create safety and security in the country as UNMIL undergoes transition and draws down its military contingents.

Fourthly, the hub was developed on the assumption that the accountability of justice and security providers would improve if the hub made it easier for the public to register complaints. Accordingly, the hub would contain a public outreach office where complaints against justice and security providers could be received and referred on to the relevant agency for processing by the appropriate agency mechanism. The Gbargna hub would include a referral mechanism which is intended to function as a sort of neutral messenger and facilitating actor between the member of the public who has lodged the complaint on the one hand, and on the other hand the relevant agency and its mechanism for processing complaints.

The fifth hypothesis underlying the hub concept was that the hub would strengthen broader links between justice and security actors operating from it and community-based services. The focus here would be on making coordination between state actors and local community groups and NGOs more effective, and ideally, moving towards a community-driven approach to justice services.

These hypotheses will be revisited in the conclusion section. The next section will examine findings from the field research on the impact that the Gbarnga hub is making in public order, community safety, and ensuring access to justice.

## II. Research Findings

### **Law Enforcement and Public Security**

The regional justice and security hubs initiative has as one of its primary goals to improve the delivery of justice and stability for inhabitants throughout the country, including remote areas.<sup>57</sup> Policing is central to this vision. One clear contribution of the hub in extending state policing authority and capacities is that it has enabled the forward deployment at the hub of Police Support Units, quick-response armed units that deploy on request by the regular Liberian National Police (LNP). Regular LNP are not based out of the Gbarnga hub but are stationed at the regional LNP command in Gbarnga city and in small depots or stations across the three counties in the region.

Initially, LNP planning foresaw the basing of a company (120) of PSU personnel in each of the five regions in Liberia.<sup>58</sup> At the time of research in June 2013, 51 PSU officers were deployed at the Gbarnga hub to respond to requests for assistance from regular police in Bong, Lofa and Nimba, the three counties covered by the hub. The total number of PSU officers in Liberia in mid-June 2013 was around 766, increasing shortly afterward to 890 with the graduation of 124 officers in mid-July.

Prior to the Gbarnga hub being built, all PSU were based in and deployed from Monrovia. As regular LNP have until recently been unarmed, that meant that it could take anywhere from half a day up to several days before an armed rapid response could deploy to where serious public order incidents were taking place in the countryside. The forward-basing of PSU at the hub was thus intended to both increase police presence and reduce police response time because of the shortened distance to respond to incidents in the three counties comprising the region, improving operational reach and effectiveness of the police.

Mobility is integral to the functioning of the PSU as a rapid response unit. While the forward-basing of PSU at the Gbarnga hub is a significant achievement resulting from the hub initiative, the effectiveness of the PSU is nevertheless constrained by the lack of adequate means of transportation. At the time that the field research

---

<sup>57</sup> United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, 'Review of Progress in the implementation of the statement of mutual commitments on peacebuilding in Liberia: First Progress Report', PBC/6/LBR/1, 13 March 2012, para 6.

<sup>58</sup> Peacebuilding Fund, 'Quick Start for Liberia Priority Plan II' (2011-13), 2010.

was undertaken, the PSU had at its disposal one older vehicle with a capacity to carry 10 personnel. The PSU have had to adapt to this constraint on their mobility. An LNP request for back-up assistance that requires a sizeable PSU response may involve successive trips by the one vehicle to transport the needed number of PSU officers. In one instance when a riot was occurring in neighbouring county, the PSU lacked transportation and had to wait for vehicles to be sent from Monrovia. In other instances the PSU have borrowed a vehicle, specifically from the Border Patrol Unit (BPU), which is also based at the Gbarnga hub and has two vehicles at its disposal. Thus while ability to deploy has improved by basing PSU at the hub, problems remain as a result of limited resources. The hub has also presented the opportunity, in a context of extreme resource constraints, for resource-sharing with other co-located agencies at the hub. In the case of other serious incidents, the PSU has requested assistance from UNMIL in transporting its officers to the scene. However the possibility of UN assistance will decline as patrols are curtailed and military contingents are drawn down.

According to the PSU regional commander, by mid-2013 requests for Gbarnga hub-based PSU backup to incidents of public disorder occurred on average between zero and five times a month. It is acknowledged by those involved in the planning and development of the hub initiative that leaving the 51 PSU officers sitting in the hub when they are not responding to backup calls would result in their underutilisation and likely erode their discipline, morale and cohesion.<sup>59</sup> PSU based at the Gbarnga hub have thus also been tasked with conducting 'confidence patrols'. These confidence patrols are intended to counter negative perceptions of the police that are rooted in wartime experiences, reduce fear and build citizen confidence in the police by engaging with local communities. When on confidence patrols, a PSU team will seek out the local town chief and community leaders, visiting the palaver hut, church or mosque, as well as the market, where they speak to local people, using officers who speak the local dialects. While creating more of a visible police presence in the region, these patrols are believed to also serve as a deterrent to crime. The confidence patrols take place three times each month in local communities in each of the three counties, with each patrol lasting 3-5 days.<sup>60</sup>

The PSU represent a tangible and visible assertion of state authority to deliver security to local communities. In a context of continuing weak regular LNP presence in the outlying areas, the PSU is pragmatically used to boost visibility of police and build trust through regular confidence patrols. We found that the PSU did not, however,

---

<sup>59</sup> Peacebuilding Fund, 'Quick Start for Liberia Priority Plan II (2011-13)', 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with PSU Regional Commander, Gbarnga Hub, 22 June 2013.

undertake confidence patrols with regular LNP based in the localities they visited, and that this perhaps constituted a missed opportunity to further raise the profile of the LNP and develop closer working relationships between regular LNP and PSU.

One of the most striking findings that emerged from the field research was the generally positive attitude that we encountered towards the police among people we interviewed in and around Gbarnga. The research team did not have the time or resources to conduct a representative public opinion survey, and consequently our findings are indicative rather than representative. However, from both our formal interviews and casual discussions with people in Gbarnga and surrounding communities, members of civil society organisations, and individuals working for and with the Liberian justice sector more broadly and with the UN, we formed a different perspective of the LNP than what has sometimes been portrayed. We generally found that a number of our respondents expressed trust in police, and also an understanding of the extreme lack of adequate resources that affect both the working and living conditions of the LNP. We heard from one civil society representative that peoples' attitude towards the police had changed since the war. 'People know they can go to the police now if they need to.' Similarly, a journalist in Gbarnga noted that seeing the police making confidence patrols (PSU) 'makes people feel safe'.

Our findings are also echoed in a 2012 baseline survey which indicated a somewhat low but overall degree of satisfaction in Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties with the level of personal and community safety: 62% of respondents felt their community was secure or very secure, and 65% of respondents felt personally safe or very safe. While only 52% of respondents felt that the Liberia National Police and Police Support Units were capable of responding to security threats, a somewhat higher percentage, 62%, expressed some dissatisfaction with how quickly police responded to crime in their community. 64% of respondents reported that they had to pay fees for police to investigate crimes in their community. Yet 67% found that the relationship between security personnel and civilians to be good or very good, and 20% found the relationship to be fair. These findings can be interpreted as being broadly consistent with the findings of yet another survey, as reported in the 2011 UN Rule of Law Indicators Report.<sup>61</sup> According to that report, 76.9% of Liberian respondents

---

<sup>61</sup> This is an unpublished study by the Vera Institute of Justice in which the draft UN rule of law indicators to measure change in a given criminal justice system (law enforcement agencies, judicial system and correctional system) underwent a trial run in Haiti, Liberia and South Sudan.

agree fully or in part that the police do as much as they can to be of service to the community.<sup>62</sup>

Notwithstanding the generally positive view of police by the Liberian public, there is a fundamental capacity and resources problem that continues to afflict the police. One of the main problems, acknowledged by all whom we interviewed, is the lack of adequate budgetary resources for the police. Our field research confirmed that the LNP regional headquarter and various depots located in and around Gbarnga continue to lack vehicles, radio communications, electricity, equipment and basic office supplies. Lack of funding affects the ability of LNP to perform basic law enforcement functions.

Regular LNP, but also the better-trained and more mobile PSU, remain severely under-resourced, and lack sufficient vehicles, and therefore mobility and capacity to effectively perform their duties. As noted by the LNP Inspector General, ‘...the Liberia National Police, by the very nature of our work require continuous adequate and appropriate logistics to effectively carry out our job. There are cries all over the country by our people for the presence of police in their areas, but for the police to be where they should be when they should be requires logistics and more logistics. We are not crying ‘wolf’ as some may think. The police have genuine need of logistics, including communication, vehicles, uniforms, as well as infrastructure to be able to do the people’s business of providing security.’<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, the challenges for LNP in the leeward are daunting. The regular LNP are dispersed in police stations or depots in the major towns and villages across the three counties, including the regional LNP HQ at Gbarnga city. The LNP presence is neither high in numbers nor well distributed throughout the region. A 2010 study established that there were merely 102 regular LNP officers, including 7 female LNP, dispersed in 10 police posts in Bong County that year. For a county population of around 329,000, that translated into a police-to-civilian ratio of 1: 3,300.<sup>64</sup> In Nimba County, a similar ratio of about 1: 3,300 applied for 128 LNP deployed to police a population of 462,000 in 2008.<sup>65</sup> In Lofa, with a population of 270,000, there were 158 LNP

---

<sup>62</sup> Liberia Peacebuilding Office, ‘Report on Baseline Public Perception Survey’, October 2012, p. 13.

<sup>63</sup> Chris Massaquoi, Director, Liberia National Police, in Joint Press Conference by Liberia National Police and UNPOL, 16 January 2013. Available at: <http://unmil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?ctl=Details&tabid=3982&mid=6800&ItemID=900246>, last accessed 10 May 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Reeve with Jackson Speare, ‘Security and Justice from a County Perspective: Bong County, Liberia’, International Alert, November 2010, p. 14.

<sup>65</sup> LNP figure from Republic of Liberia, *Nimba County Development Agenda*, 2008-2012, p. 13. Population figure is from the 2008 census. See also Richard Reeve and

including 18 female officers deployed in 2010, for a police-to-citizen ratio of 1: 1,700.<sup>66</sup>

Police stations throughout the leeward, but especially in the regions most affected by the fighting during the civil war, which include Lofa and Bong, were often completely destroyed. Although a number have been rebuilt or renovated through UN Quick Impact Project funding, many lack the most basic amenities, and LNP have no means of transportation. LNP salaries are also low and officers have difficulty meeting their basic living expenses, contributing to petty corruption. This was acknowledged by the LNP's then Deputy Police Director for Administration when she noted in 2013 that a patrol officer's basic salary stands at around USD \$150, which is insufficient to cover basic living expenses, monthly rent for an officer's family typically running to \$75 per month (and with a standard down payment for accommodation of 6-12 months' rent), school fees for their children, and food. As she noted, 'You hear a lot of reports about corruption – corruption in the police. We are saying that there is situation that is created for some of us, which makes it easy for some of us to do things...that are not pleasant.'<sup>67</sup>

It is worth noting that Deputy Director Stryker came under heavy criticism for these remarks, and her efforts to explain why the practice of imposing 'fees' was pervasive and occurring at the level of basic patrol officers was portrayed in media accounts as an act of condoning police corruption. This criticism was revived in the wake of two NGO reports that highlighted the ubiquity of petty corruption among Liberian police. Transparency International's *Global Corruption Barometer*, issued in July 2013, placed concern about corruption in Liberia at 4.8 (on a scale between 1 and 5), with 77% of respondents reporting that they or someone in their household had paid a bribe to the police in the last 12 months (the figure of reported bribery in the judiciary was similarly 77%). In the same survey, 95% of respondents felt that the police were corrupt or extremely corrupt.<sup>68</sup> This was

---

Jackson Speare, 'Human Security in Liberia', *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*, Issue 23: Consolidating Peace – Liberia and Sierra Leone (March 2012), p. 41.

<sup>66</sup> Reeve with Speare, 'Security and Justice from a County Perspective: Lofa County', p. 14.

<sup>67</sup> Deputy Police Director for Administration Rose E. Stryker cited in Winston W. Parley, 'Police Chief Backs Corrupt Cops', *The New Dawn* (Monrovia), 10 January 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Transparency International, *Global Corruption Barometer 2013*. Liberia results available at: <http://www.transparency.org/gcb2013/country/?country=liberia>. Last accessed 10 May 2014.

followed shortly after by a report by Human Rights Watch, which issued a report condemning pervasive police corruption in Liberia.<sup>69</sup>

As discussed above, Liberia's police are low in numbers for the population, and concentrated in Monrovia. The pay of regular LNP is insufficient to meet basic living needs; however their financial situation becomes even more tenuous when they are sent on rotation to the leeward regions. Liberia is one of the few countries in West Africa that does not yet have a comprehensive system of police barracks or housing allowances to offset the costs for police officers who are deployed away from their homes and families, and LNP officers are expected to be on regular rotation. LNP deployed upcountry are thus responsible themselves for finding and paying for their new living quarters. For officers who have families, they must find new accommodation while continuing to support their families, who they often cannot afford to bring with them.

In addition to the added financial challenges of a rural posting, there are other disincentives relating to restricted professional opportunities that dissuade regular LNP officers from readily accepting deployment in the leeward. This includes reduced or no opportunities for in-service training, workshops, remedial services, and other forms of professional development that exist in Monrovia. Thus, although Liberia maintains a policy of rotation of police officers to the rural areas such as Gbarnga, many officers do not want to deploy to the leeward regions because of the above factors, perpetuating the systemic under-representation of police outside of Monrovia.

PSU and ERU officers enjoy better conditions compared to regular LNP.<sup>70</sup> Both PSU and ERU officers have a higher salary than regular LNP officers. The Gbarnga hub provides accommodation and food for PSU officers. Members of the PSU and ERU are recruited from within the LNP, and candidates must have two years of service in the LNP before applying. Because the PSU and ERU are better trained, better paid (ERU being the best paid), the officers of these specialised elite units have more opportunities for professional development, and are better equipped and have higher level of prestige. We heard that these are strong incentives for regular police to seek to join these elite units, creating a further drain on regular LNP. However, as mentioned, even though better paid than regular LNP, PSU officers also suffer constraints due to lack of budgetary resources in terms of limited

---

<sup>69</sup> Human Rights Watch, *"No Money, No Justice": Police Corruption and Abuse in Liberia*, August 2013.

<sup>70</sup> As there were no ERU based at the Gbarnga hub, we sought no further information on them in terms of their operational functions. However, as discussed below, accountability and complaint mechanisms remain pertinent to discussion of the Gbarnga hub.

logistical capacities, an absence of food and lodging allowances when out on multi-day confidence patrols, limited equipment and infrastructure at the hub, etc.<sup>71</sup>

The consistent under-resourcing of the LNP helps to explain why LNP officers, who are poorly paid, and who lack the minimal resources to function in their professional capacity, impose ‘fees’ on members of the public and otherwise engage in what may be considered petty corruption. The chronic under-resourcing of the LNP feeds petty corruption as police seek to pass on the costs of conducting basic police work to those who require their assistance -- the victims of crime. Without police vehicles, regular police must pay a motorbike or car taxi to take them to investigate crime scenes or transport suspects with money out of their own pockets, or they must find some other means to cover the cost of motorbike taxis and car taxis. Transport favours from motorists may also be solicited. Without the mobility that is provided having sufficient vehicles, and lacking forensics and other basic capacities and equipment, police officers cannot effectively investigate crimes, collect evidence, and follow up on cases. As mentioned above, UNMIL military and police contingents will less and less be a source of transportation for regular LNP as the mission curtails patrols and draws down in the transition.

Under-resourcing of the police budget has effects on the most mundane of tasks necessary for the police to carry out their duties. For example, without a photocopier, and lacking budgetary funds to pay for commercial photocopies of files required for court proceedings, police must similarly either pay for photocopies out of their own pockets, or find some other means, i.e. charging fees to the victims. These ‘fees’ may in some circumstances be opportunistic, but it was evident to the research team that if no budgetary funds were available, imposing user fees would be the only means of carrying out the activity. While fees charged by individual police officers are often categorised by Western observers as ‘soliciting bribes’ or petty corruption, these are not only a means of making up for very low salaries of regular police, which are under even more strain in the leeward because of the lack of housing or a housing allowance, but because the police often simply lack the basic resources required to do their work.

The source of the constraints facing the Liberian police, particularly in the leeward, is inadequate resources budgeted for the security and justice sectors by the central government in Monrovia. While Government of Liberia spending on policing in 2012-13 amounted to US \$19.9 million, this was decreased 18% in the 2013-14 budget to

---

<sup>71</sup> Correspondence with Franziska Zanker, 28 April 2014.



\$16.4 million.<sup>72</sup> In September 2013 the UN's Special Representative for Liberia sounded a public warning that Liberia was not increasing the presence of security forces or improving their operational effectiveness sufficiently to take over from UN peacekeeping forces as they draw down. The Special Representative specifically criticised Liberia for reducing budgetary allocations for police significantly from the preceding year, and for failing to train new police fast enough, with only 99 officers graduating from the Police Academy in 2012 despite the earlier expansion of the Police Academy to train 600 per year. A further 148 police recruits were delayed a year in graduating due to budget constraints.<sup>73</sup> In response to the SRSG's warning, the President and the Minister of Finance immediately promised that efforts would be made to provide sufficient resources for the justice and security sectors in the coming fiscal year, specifically through the introduction of a supplemental budget. The Government of Liberia announced that it would contribute US \$1 million for the second and third regional hubs in addition to ensuring coverage of recurrent costs.<sup>74</sup>

Funding shortfalls, complicated budgetary mechanisms and weak financial management skills within the LNP have further contributed to problems in enabling the disbursement of budgetary funds to the policing sector. In early 2014, the Minister of Finance undertook to ease procedures for disbursement of policing-related funding.<sup>75</sup> Thus, while the hub has raised policing capacity and extended the state's authority through the PSU, systemic budgeting shortfalls forms the backdrop and sets narrow boundaries to those achievements, and remain a serious constraint on the functioning of regular LNP already in place at depots throughout the counties.

## Border Management

At the time of field research in June 2013, the Gbarnga hub hosted 45 Border Patrol Unit (BPU) officers, to be deployed as backup for regular Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) officers based at the border in Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties, to conduct surveillance patrols at the border and to respond to border security incidents. The Gbarnga hub-based BPU reportedly sends patrols to each county border region two or three times per month, with each border patrol visit

---

<sup>72</sup> Ministry of Finance, *Draft National Budget for FY 2013/14*, p. 238.

<sup>73</sup> 'UN: Liberia police unprepared to handle security', Associated Press, 11 September 2013.

<sup>74</sup> Visit of H.E. Staffan Tillander, Chair of the PBC Liberia Country Configuration to Liberia, 15-20 September 2013, Mission Report, pp. 1-2.

<sup>75</sup> Karin Lundgren, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of the United Nations Operations in Liberia, 'Briefing to the Security Council on the Twenty-Seventh Progress Report of the Secretary-General on UNMIL', 20 March 2014.

lasting several days.<sup>76</sup> The hub contains a dormitory for the BPU officers, and the BPU has two pickup trucks that are located at the hub.

The hub offers several benefits for building Liberia's border management capacities. First, basing BPU at the Gbarnga hub could be reasonably expected to improve the response times for security incident response in the region, since BPU units deploying from the Gbarnga hub are closer to the country's northern border than if they were deployed from Monrovia as previously had been the case. Second, the hub provides dormitory accommodation for the BPU officers. BIN officers are in the same position as LNP officers in the leeward in that Liberia does not generally provide accommodation for them in the countryside, posing significant financial and practical challenges for officers. The third advantage posed by the hub is the opportunity it presents to share the BPU's two vehicles with other hub-based units, and in particular the PSU when PSU vehicles are insufficient or one has broken down. Given the extreme logistical challenges posed by lack of mobility afflicting all security and justice providers in the leeward, this ability to share transportation resources is important.

Nevertheless, the stationing of the BPU at the hub reduces but does not fully resolve the problem of distance and logistics; the BPUs at the Gbarnga hub remain centralised inland from the border, rather than being dispersed in close proximity to the border. The poor condition of Liberia's roads and the extremely challenging terrain in the border region, much of which runs through dense tropical forest, poses significant challenges to border management. The two pickup trucks allocated to the BPU at Gbarnga are a critical resource but are insufficient. As most of the roads in the border region are not accessible by car, there is also more need of motorcycles for border patrols.<sup>77</sup> Continuing limitations on mobility posed by insufficient vehicles for border and law enforcement officials raises the question of why the BPU were located at the hub rather than closer to the border.

According to original planning for the Gbarnga hub, basing BPU at the hub would benefit from co-location with other law enforcement officers at the hub. 'Co-locating BIN Regional Commanders with their LNP counterparts will enable information and intelligence to be quickly shared in relation to the general security situation and particular incidents in their area of responsibility.'<sup>78</sup> This argument for co-locating the BPU with PSU and other services at the hub appears weak in the current context when weighed against the advantages of improving service delivery – surveillance patrolling and security incident response – through locating BPUs closer to the border.

---

<sup>76</sup> Interview with BPU Regional Commander, Gbarnga Hub, 24 June 2013.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with BPU Commander, Gbarnga Hub, 24 June 2013.

<sup>78</sup> Peacebuilding Fund, 'Quick Start for Liberia Priority Plan II (2011-13)'.

Co-location in the context of border management actually does exist at some key border posts that host multiple agencies that work closely together and may conduct joint operations. For example, the LNP and customs work in the same office as the BIN, and conduct joint operations at a major border crossing on the border between Sierra Leone and Liberia. The research team also heard that there are plans to establish a network of community policing meetings along the border, involving BIN and LNP officers from Liberia, BIN and gendarmerie from Côte d'Ivoire, and civil society from both sides of the border.<sup>79</sup> Thus potential benefits in terms of sharing of information, improved coordination and improved service delivery as a result of co-location of border personnel with other law enforcement personnel would appear more evident at the border itself, than at the hub.

Notwithstanding the advantages of faster response time, accommodation for BPU and the opportunity to pool transportation resources, it appears that the Gbargna hub is understood as not offering a model to emulate insofar as border management is concerned, since planning for subsequent hubs will not host BPU officers, who will rather be based in offices along the border.<sup>80</sup>

### **Access to justice**

One of the key priorities of the justice and security hub initiative is to strengthen the capacity of formal justice sector institutions and enhance access to justice throughout the region. According to original plans from 2010, this would be achieved in two ways. First, the hub project would increase the regional presence of judicial and prosecutorial personnel, including state prosecutors (county attorneys), prosecutors, public defenders and judges. At the time that the hub project was first approved, there was only one legally qualified county attorney and one legally qualified state-provided defence counsel per county. Second, access to justice would be improved by strengthening justice sector infrastructure, specifically through the construction of both a two-room county circuit court and a county magistrate court at the hub, as well as by making improvements to the Gbarnga corrections facility, located 2 km away from the hub on the road to Gbarnga town.<sup>81</sup> Beyond the construction of new courts at the hub, and increasing the number of county attorneys and public defenders working at them, there would also be enhanced delivery to the areas beyond the hubs through the employment of mobile courts that would travel regularly to smaller cities and towns to resolve minor disputes, provide legal advice to pre-trial detainees in correctional facilities, and provide other services. Further, it was envisioned that

---

<sup>79</sup> Interview with John Nielsen, Police Commissioner, UNPOL, Monrovia, 27 June 2013.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Juan Gaitan, Project Manager, UNOPS, Monrovia, 17 June 2013.

<sup>81</sup> Peacebuilding Fund, 'Quick Start for Liberia Priority Plan II (2011-13)'.

legal aid desks would be established at the hub to provide legal advice and referrals to NGOs that provide various services, such as transportation, shelter, and representation.<sup>82</sup>

At the time of our field research, the courthouse complex was still under construction at the hub and few justice-related services had yet moved to the hub. The location of the courts at the hub is intended to facilitate the interaction of justice and security personnel, and we were informed that once the new magisterial and circuit courts were constructed, the judges, county attorneys, public defenders and prosecutors would all be based at the hub, as would probation service personnel. Judges would also have their residential quarters at the hub.<sup>83</sup> During construction of the Gbarnga hub, seven magisterial courts operated in Bong County (two in Gbarnga city), and one circuit court (also in Gbarnga city). The county prosecutor continued to be based in Gbarnga city as well. In anticipation of the increased case load resulting from the increased police (PSU) presence in the region, the creation of new magisterial courts was planned, and additional staff would be provided in the form of one additional public defender and one additional public prosecutor. In increasing police capacity and magisterial courts, it was expected that there would also be a corresponding increase in demand for services provided by the circuit court (the court of second instance), hence there was an acknowledged need to increase the capacity of the circuit court for the region.<sup>84</sup>

Although the core justice services had not yet begun to be delivered from the hub at the time of our field visit, some preliminary observations were possible. The advantages to relocating the circuit court at the hub appeared ambiguous to many people we interviewed. This is largely linked to the logistical challenges for those who must use the court services. Once the circuit court begins operating from the hub, people from the three counties will be required to travel to the hub rather than to Gbarnga city, posing added logistical challenges. The accessibility of the hub was an issue of concern for several observers, as it was acknowledged that many people would have to walk the 5 km to the hub from Gbarnga city, sometimes accompanied by their children, including in the rainy season.

There were nevertheless some advantages expected from co-locating various justice sector personnel at the hub. For example, the close

---

<sup>82</sup> Peacebuilding Fund, 'Quick Start for Liberia Priority Plan II (2011-13)'.

<sup>83</sup> The new court complex at the hub was officially opened in April 2014. In addition to the establishment of the new circuit court, the magisterial court in Gbarnga city was moved to the new facilities in the hub. See Namotee Kollie, 'New Circuit Court Dedicated in Bong', *The New Dawn Liberia*, 30 April 2014.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Jesse Cole, Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, Gbarnga, 24 June 2013.

proximity of the Sexual and Gender Based Violence Crime Unit (see below) to the court is expected to facilitate more effective communication and coordination between the unit and court personnel. The benefits of co-locating justice personnel should be monitored once all justice actors are in place. Logistics-related constraints will also result from the fact that the regular LNP regional HQ will continue to be located in Gbarnga city, and the county prison is located outside the hub, again raising the perennial challenges of transportation between these venues and the justice facilities at the hub.

What the hub does not, and perhaps cannot, address is the more systemic dysfunction of Liberia's formal justice system and the widespread preference of citizens to resort to informal/customary justice providers. Liberia's citizens face numerous challenges in accessing the formal justice system, not the least of which is pervasive lack of knowledge about that system. According to a survey of the three counties conducted in 2012, 85% of respondents declared that they knew very little or nothing about the Liberian justice system. Further, some 72% of respondents preferred using traditional justice methods (such as town or village chiefs) to resolve disputes over using the formal state courts and police.<sup>85</sup>

While the overwhelming preference of citizens to use customary justice providers may in part be due to the general population not being widely familiar with the formal justice system, results from another Liberia-wide survey taken in late 2010 suggest that Liberians lack trust in judges and hold negative perceptions of the formal justice system. That survey reported 75% agreeing with the statement that 'going to court is too expensive', 44% agreeing that 'going to court means you have to bribe the judges', and only 23% agreeing that 'judgements are the same for everyone.' The same survey found that while only 32% of respondents thought accessing the formal court system was easy or very easy, 79% felt that it was easy or very easy to access the town or village chief for dispute resolution.<sup>86</sup>

According to members of local community-based organisations, poor people do not have the means to pay the fees required to register a case with the police (this was reportedly about Liberian \$2,000 or \$3,000 at the time of research) or to see a court case through to its conclusion. There are also significant logistical and financial

---

<sup>85</sup> Liberia Peacebuilding Office, 'Report on Baseline Public Perception Survey', October 2012, pp. 6-10.

<sup>86</sup> Patrick Vinck, Phuong Pham, and Tino Kreutzer, *Talking Peace: A Population-Based Survey on Attitudes About Security, Dispute Resolution, and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Liberia* (Berkeley, CA: Human Rights Center, University of California -- Berkeley, June 2011), p. 65.

challenges of getting a case to court in the countryside. All evidence, witnesses, and the victim must be present at the first hearing. This poses challenges due to the difficult terrain and sometimes the numbers of witnesses who must appear; one respondent described a case involving fatalities at a riot, in which the prosecution had 22 witnesses and the defendant had 12. This requirement also imposes costs, often for the victim. Making four copies of each police case report (typically 17 pages or so) is required when a case goes to court, but police are allotted no budget for photocopying and must find the money to get the files photocopied commercially. In certain cases concerning SGBV, the LNP's Women and Childrens Protection Service (WACPS) unit covers these costs, while in others the victim must provide the money in the form of fees. The imposition of informal fees to finance basic policing and justice services that are supposed to be provided as a public good to all Liberians means that many Liberians simply cannot afford to use the formal justice system. As stated to us by one female civil society activist near Gbarnga, in Liberia 'there is no justice for the poor'.

Due to overloaded court dockets and lack of adequate personnel, relatively few cases end up being heard in court. UNMIL estimates that only 8 per cent of cases are fully tried in Liberia.<sup>87</sup> As a result, we heard that many victims of crimes are content to have the police apprehend a suspect, detain them for questioning and hold them in pre-trial detention. There is a very real possibility that a suspect may spend months in jail waiting for his or her case to be heard with the ultimate result that a case will be thrown out because it is not heard within the prescribed time limit, and the suspect released. For lack of a better and feasible alternative, we heard that this is accepted by some victims of crime as a form of justice. The acceptance in some instances may stem from ignorance of the justice process on the part of victims (believing that pre-trial detention means that the alleged perpetrator has been sent to jail as a custodial sentence, although it is really pre-trial detention), or may also be the result of a pragmatic acceptance that pre-trial detention of the accused is the best outcome they can hope for given the difficulties of seeing a court case through to the end.

When a case is heard by a lower level magistrate court is deemed serious and progresses to the county's circuit court, the odds of it being heard decrease due to the short court terms and extremely overloaded dockets of Liberia's circuit courts. There is a single circuit court in Gbarnga for Bong County. The average length of a circuit court term is 42 days, and there are four terms in a year, divided into two court sessions per year. The court closes for a month after each session. The court term is short, and Liberia lacks sufficient judges. Serious cases

---

<sup>87</sup> Karin Lundgren, SRSG and Co-ordinator of UN Operations in Liberia, 'Briefing to the Security Council', 20 March 2014.

concerning murder, rape, etc., take priority for the court and these also tend to be the most complex. We heard that in a single term, sometimes only two or three cases will be heard. As a result, the circuit court docket (calendar) is consistently overloaded. A recent survey of various Liberian circuit courts found them to have between 150 and 300 docketed cases. In a 42-day term, three cases were typically heard, and in some instances a single case would extend beyond one court term.<sup>88</sup> One case alone recently took 68 days to resolve.<sup>89</sup>

One of the improvements to the bottlenecks in the court system has been to increase the number of sitting circuit court judges. Whereas there was formerly only one circuit court judge per county, there are now two judges in circuit court, and there is reportedly a division of labour in that they focus on different types of cases to improve efficiency. There have also been efforts to increase the types of cases that can be heard in magistrate courts, and in October it was announced that through amendment of the Judiciary Law and Criminal Procedure Law, the jurisdiction of the magistrate courts would be widened. Whereas the jurisdiction of magistrate courts formerly extended only to infractions and petty larceny, the scope of their jurisdiction would henceforth include all first, second and third degree misdemeanour cases.<sup>90</sup>

Another solution to justice challenges that Liberia is attempting to implement is the combination of customary and formal justice systems, as well as the introduction of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) for resolving smaller disputes and minor offences at the community level. Liberia National Police officers have referred minor issues to the customary justice system in which village, tribal and clan chiefs handle minor civil disputes, a procedure which is considered adequate and faster than the formal justice system.

Grave offences (rape, aggravated assault, murder), however, must be dealt with as criminal offences under the formal justice system, and Liberian law prohibits customary justice providers from dealing with criminal offences. Nevertheless, we were informed that the court also does not go out 'looking for' cases; people must lodge a formal complaint in the case of a grave offence in order for the court to act. But this registering of complaints is often undermined by the financial costs imposed on victims as well as other barriers discussed above, and often victims simply cannot afford the various fees associated with

---

<sup>88</sup> Bill E. Diggs, 'Circuit Courts Close with Little Progress', *Insight Newspaper* (Monrovia), 2013.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Aaron Juakolle, Foundation for International Dignity (FIND), Gbarnga, 24 June 2013.

<sup>90</sup> George J. Borteh, 'Magistrates granted more powers – Chief Justice discloses', *The New Republic Liberia* (Monrovia), 16 October 2013.

taking a case to court.<sup>91</sup> In SGBV cases, an NGO representative recounted that victims and their families in Liberia are often reluctant to testify, especially if they are related to the perpetrator. Although we heard of efforts to raise awareness among people of the need to follow a case through to the end, victims are often reluctant to testify and often victims or their families appear satisfied to secure a settlement from the alleged perpetrator instead of registering a case and seeing it through the court.

### **Corrections and rehabilitation**

One of the knock-on effects of insufficient court capacity and the backlog in the criminal justice process described above is an extremely high proportion of inmates who are held in Liberia's prisons without being charged or tried. Pre-trial detainees constituted 78% of inmates of Liberia's prisons in 2012.<sup>92</sup> The backlog also has contributed to the severe overcrowding of Liberia's prisons, particularly the main prison in Monrovia, which accounts for 50% of all prisoners in Liberia; although originally constructed with capacity to hold 350 prisoners, by October 2013 the Monrovia prison held 1,044 inmates.<sup>93</sup>

The Gbarnga Central Prison is not physically located at the hub, but lies two kilometres from the hub on the road between the hub and Gbarnga city. There are 74 corrections and rehabilitation prison officials (including seven females) for this facility, which serves the three counties of Bong, Lofa and Nimba. The prison has a capacity to hold 143 inmates, including accommodation for 16 female inmates. In late June 2013, the prison housed 93 inmates in total, of which three were female. Female prisoners are separated from the male prisoner population, as are juveniles. Of the 93 prisoners, 21 had been convicted of crimes and were serving sentences, while the remainder were detainees still awaiting trial.<sup>94</sup> Thus Gbarnga Central Prison's pre-trial detainee rate comprising 77% of inmates closely reflects the national average cited above. Moreover, the snapshot figure from June 2013 may indicate a decrease in the ratio of pre-trial detainees compared to the previous year, when a reported 106 out of 122 inmates were pre-trial detainees, or 87% of the prison population.<sup>95</sup> This trend is only indicative however; pre-trial detention rates should be

---

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Cornelius Flomo Wennah, County Prosecutor, Bong County, Gbarnga, 19 June 2013.

<sup>92</sup> US State Department, *Liberia Human Rights Report*, 2012.

<sup>93</sup> Peter N. Toby, 'Vigorous Action Needed for Overcrowded Prison', *New Democratic* (Monrovia), 16 October 2013.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Feshell Deanor, Prison Superintendent, Gbarnga Central Prison, 21 June 2013.

<sup>95</sup> Massa F. Kaneh, 'Gbarnga Central Prison Over Crowded: Pre-Trial Detainees Lament Long Wait for Trial', *Front Page Africa*, 1 October 2012.



systematically tracked at Gbarnga Central Prison as well as other correctional facilities that will be linked to subsequent justice and security hubs.

An initiative that may have contributed to the lowering of the pre-trial detention rate in Gbarnga prison is the ‘fast-track court’ that takes place at the prison. Fast-track courts have been implemented in Liberia’s main prisons to release suspects whose pre-trial detention time has exceeded the legal limit. According to Section 18.2 of the Liberian Criminal Procedure Law, anyone accused of an indictable offence must be indicted and tried within two court terms, or be released. The fast-track court was initially implemented in Monrovia Central Prison, where over 700 pre-trial detainees were released in 2012.<sup>96</sup> The Gbarnga Central Prison has also introduced fast-track court proceedings, involving qualified justice personnel from the magisterial court who go to the prison to process and help clear the backlog of pre-trial detainees. However, the same logistical challenges affect the fast-track court as the regular court: if witnesses are unable or unwilling to appear when the case is heard, the case will be dismissed.<sup>97</sup>

Probation was also introduced in Liberia as a partial measure to help address the problem of prison overcrowding. While probation existed on the books in Liberian law for many years, it was only introduced in practice in 2010, beginning with one-year pilot projects in Bong and Montserrado counties. With the development of the Gbarnga hub, the pilot phase came to an end and the regional probation service was located at the hub beginning in 2011. The hub hosts four probation officers and one administrator, who service the three counties of Bong, Lofa and Nimba, although they tend to focus on the Gbarnga area. Probation is possible for those who have committed minor and first time offences. It may involve restitution by paying back to the victim the damage caused by the crime, and through community service offers offenders the opportunity to reintegrate back into the community. Probation officers based at the Gbarnga hub have one motorbike at their disposal to go out into the local communities where individuals on probation are living to ensure that they are behaving and complying with the conditions of probation. Once every month, such visits are conducted to supervise offenders on probation. Through a strategy of ‘collateral contact’ – i.e. sensitising and working with chiefs, elders, youth leaders, and other influential members of the community – the probation officers also create an informal community network effect where, if the person on probation misbehaves, community members will be more likely to contact the probation officer. As of June 2013,

---

<sup>96</sup> U.S. State Department, 2012 *Human Rights Report*, ‘Liberia’, 2013.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Feshell Deanor, Prison Superintendent, Gbarnga Central Prison, 21 June 2013.

some 46 persons in Bong County had been on probation, 19 undergoing community supervision at the time.<sup>98</sup>

Although it is physically separated from the hub, Gbarnga Central Prison has benefited from infrastructure improvements that were undertaken as a direct result of hub development. Renovations were undertaken and a new medical clinic was created within the prison. The prison is visited several times per week by paramedics and a nurse, with medications being provided by the Ministry of Health. The building of the medical clinic was of particular importance in view of the lack of adequate transportation, which made it very difficult to transport detainees and prisoners who became ill to hospital. The building of the clinic in Gbarnga prison has been a very positive achievement of the hub initiative.

Another improvement that we found in June 2013 was the feeding of inmates two times per day by the prison itself, where formerly according to reports from the preceding year they were fed only once per day.<sup>99</sup> Local NGOs and the International Committee of the Red Cross have also advised prison authorities on improving conditions for prisoners, such as the suggestion to add more beans to meals for prisoners when meat is unavailable. The good condition of the prison was credited by one respondent to a very good head of prisons for the county, who had had previous professional experience running a prison in the United States. Compared to other post-conflict environments, the Gbarnga prison was said by this informed observer to be very well run, with exemplary conditions including the separate women's and children's facilities and prisoners' access to fresh air. In his view, the prison constitutes the best component of justice and security connected to the Gbarnga hub.<sup>100</sup>

Nevertheless, a continuing and serious problem with regard to the prison is the lack of transportation. At the time of field research, prisoners were still being escorted on foot between the court in Gbarnga city and the prison or by the one motorbike at the disposal of the prison. Prisoner escorts conducted on foot are potentially dangerous, carrying the risk of attacks on escorting officers and mob justice. Transport of detainees from the prison to court by motorcycle escort also poses obvious dangers to the escorting officer. These transportation challenges are expected to continue when the magisterial and circuit courts shift from Gbarnga city and begin to operate from the hub.

---

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Abraham Cooper, Supervisor and Edwin N. McGill, Probation Officer, Division of Probation Services, Bong County, Gbarnga Regional Hub, 21 June 2013.

<sup>99</sup> Kaneh, 'Gbarnga Central Prison Overcrowded'.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Michael Page, SSR Adviser, UNMIL, Monrovia, 27 June 2013.

Another problem encountered at the Gbarnga prison is the lack of resources to provide skills training to inmates. Since hard-core criminals reside alongside minor offenders, the lack of work skills training, and particularly in a post-conflict environment where a generation of youth lacked formal education, means in practice that time spent incarcerated in prison can produce more serious and better skilled criminals. In this context, the probation program for minor and first-time offenders offers some rehabilitative prospects. Thus, while resource constraints continue to pose serious obstacles to the development of the criminal justice sector in Liberia, several positive developments can be seen at the Gbarnga prison and in the broader area of corrections in the region as a result of the hub initiative.

### **Security and Justice for Women and Children**

The Gbarnga justice and security hub hosts the regional office of the Sexual and Gender-based Violence Crime Unit. As described to the team the SGBV Crime Unit is focused specifically on sexual violence – rape, gang rape, sexual assault, attempted rape and sodomy. The SGBV Crime Unit, with its head office in Monrovia, was first established and started prosecuting cases in 2009. The SGBV Crime Unit is a part of the prosecution arm of the Ministry of Justice, and the Unit is headed by the Chief Justice in Criminal Court E, which is Liberia’s special court for trying cases of SGBV. The Unit’s work centres on prosecution of cases, and it also seeks to ensure the provision of psycho-social support services to victims.

The regional SGBV Crime Unit was established and began work at the Gbarnga hub in July 2012. The SGB Unit includes two Victim Support Officers (VSOs), who provide assistance to victims through linking them up with counselling, health and other services. The Unit also includes three Case Liaison Officers (CLOs), one for each of the counties covered by the hub, who seek to ensure that sufficient evidence is presented to prosecute cases, and who function as a bridge between lawyers at the court and the police. The CLOs’ immediate supervisor is their respective county attorney.<sup>101</sup>

The Unit does not contain any police officers, but includes lawyers, people trained to investigate cases of SGBV, and people trained to provide support to victims. Activities include picking up and taking victims to the police, ensuring victims have food and clothing and other essential items, ensuring they receive medical care, and are provided counselling. The Unit also follows up cases with prosecution and defence counsels. The SGBV Crime Unit builds partnerships with court, police, those running safe houses, NGOs, and justice personnel.

---

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Poka Brown, Case Liaison Officer, SGBV Unit, Ministry of Justice, Gbarnga Hub, 21 June 2013.

The Unit interacts closely and on a daily basis with Liberia National Police officers who are working in the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS) in the regional police headquarters in Gbarnga city. We heard that the SGBV Crime Unit at the hub is quick to react and is involved in most of the WACPS work, and police at the WACPS call the Unit for each new case of SGBV that is reported.<sup>102</sup>

The research team heard that the SGBV Crime Unit also conducts outreach and training activities. Outreach to the community is done via radio talk shows, flyers, billboards and workshops. For example, we heard of a training workshop held in mid-June that was conducted by the SGBV Crime Unit on the guarding and preservation of evidence and interviewing of survivors. The workshop involved 45 participants from Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties, and importantly included some police officers who had not yet received training on how to preserve evidence in cases involving SGBV.

The Gbarnga justice and security hub initiative provided the means to establish this Unit for the region on a permanent footing, and thus can be considered another positive outcome of the hub. However, there appeared to be a lack of information about how the SGBV Crime Unit functioned at the hub and in particular how victims of SGBV would access their services at the hub. One respondent described the ease with which victims of SGBV could walk into the WACPS, which are located at many police depots in Liberia including the regional LNP HQ in Gbarnga city, and contrasted this experience to the challenge of going to the hub located outside Gbarnga city, and gaining entrance to an imposing fenced and guarded facility, housing a bureaucracy about which little was publicly known. It was also suggested that more clarity was needed about procedures, and relationships between the SGBV Crime Unit and existing offices that are already providing support for SGBV victims outside the hub.<sup>103</sup>

Other challenges involved constraints in terms of human resources (the SGBV Crime Unit at the Gbarnga hub have only five staff members), and the need for more resources, especially to improve their logistics. They need to be able to go to areas where they can get first-hand information about SGBV cases, and ensure that lawyers have sufficient evidence to prosecute a case. Having adequate logistical capacities is vital since evidence can be compromised or lost if their response is delayed. We heard that although the SGBV Unit at the Gbarnga hub had one vehicle at its disposal, it was not functioning at the time.

---

<sup>102</sup> Interview, Women and Children Protection Service (WACPS) officer, LNP Regional HQ, Gbarnga, 24 June 2013.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Madhumita Sarkar, Joint Programme Advisor, SGBV, UNDP, Monrovia, 18 June 2013.

We also heard of the often essential assistance provided by various NGOs to facilitate victim support and access to justice through activities as diverse as training paralegals to inform and support community members in the justice process, training members of justice and security sectors on SGBV, and providing transportation and social and material support services to victims.<sup>104</sup> Various local NGOs and civil society groups in the Gbarnga hub area have filled numerous gaps in provision of justice and security delivery by the Liberian state actors who lack the means to properly carry out their functions. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), through its SGBV victim support services, conducts such essential services as transporting victims of SGBV to hospital and police. Community groups, such as women's groups, monitor SGBV-related court cases and incarceration of those convicted of such crimes, and provide counselling and mediation to victims and their families in cases of domestic violence.

Added to this is the support that UNMIL has provided to justice and security actors. We were told of an instance when UNMIL airlifted a 14 year-old rape victim who was in critical condition to Monrovia. If UNMIL had not been present and willing to assist, it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to ensure that the victim received the necessary medical care.<sup>105</sup> The UNMIL drawdown is being mirrored by some international NGOs by a similar transition and withdrawal strategy, raising real concerns about how essential services now being provided through this combination of actors will be provided in the future; even if the SGBV Crime Unit endeavours to investigate and provide support in cases of SGBV, their effectiveness will be limited if lacking adequate logistical resources.

The creation of the SGBV Crime Unit (and the establishment of Special Court E to try SGBV crimes) was aimed at bolstering police and justice system responsiveness to gender-based crime. The broader reform context was informed by efforts to make the police both more responsive to the needs of women and more representative of the population through greater gender equity and recruitment of female officers. Although the LNP are not based out of the Gbarnga hub, one cannot assess the impact of the hub without taking into account how the operations of the LNP affect policing of SGBV. Two important developments should be noted. Conditions for female police officers were improved in a bid to improve female recruitment to 20% of police personnel. And a new unit, the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS), patterned on a similar structure in the Sierra Leone police,

---

<sup>104</sup> Trine Nikolaisen, 'Decentralising Liberia's Security Sector: The Role of Non-Governmental Actors in Justice and Security Delivery', *Conflict Trends*, Issue 3 (2013), pp. 54-55.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Poca Brown, Case Liaison Officer, SGBV Crime Unit, Gbarnga Regional Hub, 21 June 2013.

was created in 2005 in an effort to improve the responsiveness of the LNP to gender-based violence.<sup>106</sup>

According to the Deputy Head of the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS) at Liberia National Police (LNP) Headquarters in Monrovia, 75% of crimes reported to the Liberia National Police concern crimes against women and children.<sup>107</sup> The WACPS was established in 2005 to deal with these crimes through five units, focusing on sexual assaults, domestic violence, crimes involving juveniles, human trafficking). While international donors have provided the WACPS with infrastructure and originally with vehicles, sustainability remains a concern. For example, WACPS originally was provided with five vehicles, but none were operational at the time we conducted our field trip. Funding for maintenance and upkeep of the vehicles appears to be missing.

Another challenge is the high departure rate of LNP who have been trained to handle SGBV cases and hence work in WACPS, who subsequently apply for admittance into the PSU. The research team was informed by a WACPS manager at LNP Headquarters that of 245 male and female officers trained to investigate SGBV cases since the establishment of WACPS in 2005, less than 100 currently remained, primarily due to the attraction of the PSU and ERU. As noted above, members of the PSU and ERU are better paid than regular LNP, including WACPS officers. By 2014 an entry level WACPS officer made around the equivalent of \$140 USD per month.<sup>108</sup> Officers in other specialised units such as PSU made over \$200 per month.<sup>109</sup> The PSU and ERU have been recruiting more officers to build policing capacity as UNMIL draws down.

Thus, while the establishment of the SGBV Crime Unit at the Gbarnga hub has brought real capacity and opportunities for improved coordination with other justice sector actors to prosecute cases and provide support to victims, systemic resourcing problems raise concerns for the ability of the Unit and related justice and security actors including the WACPS to operate effectively and sustainably. As UNMIL continues to draw down, international support from donors and NGOs services to combat SGBV are also likely to decline, raising the prospect of new gaps in service delivery.

---

<sup>106</sup> Laura Bacon, 'Building an Inclusive, Responsive National Police Service: Gender-Sensitive Reform in Liberia, 2005-2011', *Innovations for Successful Societies*, Princeton University, April 2012, at <http://www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties>. Last accessed on 30 May 2013.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Alieu M. Bility, Unit Officer, Women and Children Protection Service, Liberia National Police Headquarters, Monrovia, 18 June 2013.

<sup>108</sup> E.J. Nathaniel Daygbor, 'Liberia: Political Interferences Threaten Police Ops', *The New Dawn* (Monrovia), 6 May 2014.

<sup>109</sup> Bacon, 'Building an Inclusive, Responsive National Police Service', p. 15.

### III. Conclusions

#### Assessment

The implementation of the Gbarnga hub encountered repeated delays and difficulties, with problems relating to the lack of proper planning, and problems of design, coordination and the construction process. Despite the problems encountered in building the Gbarnga hub, and the largely untested assumptions about co-locating security and justice providers within a Liberian setting, by June 2013 the initiative brought several specific benefits to a context where public services have been severely under-resourced or absent. The hub initiative has resulted in the introduction or consolidation of new programmes or services to the region, including probation services based at the hub, fast-track court services, and the SGBV Crime Unit. It has been the impetus to forward-base desperately needed security personnel (PSU and BPU) closer to the region, enabling a faster, albeit still limited, response to public disorder and border management contingencies in the leeward. The hub has resulted in the hiring of more corrections officers and the building of a health clinic at the Gbarnga regional prison. BPU undertake surveillance patrols at the border, and PSU are able to conduct confidence patrols and respond more quickly to LNP requests for backup, raising the profile of the Liberian state policing capacity in the region. The hub initiative has proven to be an effective vehicle for mobilising political attention, international and domestic funding, although it arguably may have diverted attention from other initiatives in the security and justice delivery domain.

As discussed in the first section of this report, five hypotheses underpinned the planning and development of the Gbarnga justice and security hub. The first hypothesis -- that co-location will enhance collaboration among justice and security providers to improve service delivery -- has yet to be proven, and cannot be ascertained until all of the planned links of the criminal justice chain are present in the hub. At the time of our interviews in late June 2013, key justice services including the court system, prosecution and public defence were still missing from the hub. Co-location of key criminal justice service providers in a centralised location has been implemented in certain other settings, where it has been found to improve service delivery and enhance the efficiency of the system.<sup>110</sup> However, given the very low

---

<sup>110</sup> For example, see the assessment of the Warwickshire Justice Centre at Leamington Spa, UK in: HM Inspectorate of Probation et al, *Improving the Criminal Justice System – lessons from local change projects* (National Audit Office, May 2012).

level of resourcing and scant presence of justice and security services in Liberia's leeward, it is unclear whether the benefits of co-location would be similar to those in a developed, well-resourced context, and whether expected benefits of placing the service providers within close physical proximity would be offset by unexpected consequences of centralising those service providers in the inconveniently located hub.

While it is too early to determine whether the full benefits of co-location will be realised at Gbarnga hub, nevertheless it is clear that there are benefits in the sharing of the few vehicles at the disposal of the PSU and BPU. The co-location concept may eventually prove to have been well-grounded in regard to some facilitating communication and coordination among certain actors based at the Gbarnga hub (especially those involving the court system when it becomes operational). The actual impact of co-locating these actors should be closely tracked to determine whether this model should be pursued in future in similar contexts. Nevertheless, the hub also created challenges for the consumers of those services in terms of distance of those centralised services from the nearest large population centre, Gbarnga city. In the case of certain actors based at the hub, there is likely to be little apparent relevance or impact of their location on their working relations with other hub inhabitants – for example, the public outreach officer who deals with citizens and Monrovia-based complaint mechanisms. In terms of future hubs, one of the early lessons learned from the experience of the Gbarnga is a shift in emphasis from infrastructure development to prioritising service delivery.<sup>111</sup> Consequently, co-location of service providers will likely also be de-emphasised for future hubs.

The second hypothesis held that the hubs would help to decentralise justice and security services, initially by deploying more service providers from Monrovia to the under-served leeward regions. A 2012 'baseline survey' conducted while the hub was still being built asked respondents about their perceptions of the regional hub. An overwhelming majority reportedly agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that the concept of the regional hub 'creates access to decentralized justice' and 'creates sense of justice and security'.<sup>112</sup> It is important to note however that at the time the perceptions survey was administered, the hub was not yet complete and was offering few services. It is likely then that the perceptions of the region's inhabitants reflected more their expectations surrounding the idea of the hub than perceptions of its actual operation. The survey nevertheless established

---

<sup>111</sup> 'Summary of the visit of H.E. Mr. Staffan Tillander, Chair of the Liberia Configuration, Peacebuilding Commission, to Liberia', 2-7 February 2014, Para 20.

<sup>112</sup> Liberia Peacebuilding Office, 'Report on Baseline Public Perception Survey', October 2012, p. 13.



a baseline, which will be useful to help measure changes in public perceptions once the hub becomes operational.

The Gbarnga hub has today achieved a ‘thin’ notion of decentralisation, although the ‘thicker’ notion has yet to be seen. Decentralisation is viewed as a means of empowering citizens, particularly those who have been excluded or marginalised in public life. Decentralisation is linked to increased public participation and inclusion in systems of governance. It is not merely a technical process, but has a political character. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has noted that decentralisation is used in Liberia in two ways: ‘true decentralisation’ which entails the devolution of political and decision-making power to locally-elected officials, and what is known as ‘deconcentration’, which gives decision-making power to officials stationed at the local level but appointed from the centre.<sup>113</sup> Deconcentration ‘tends to extend the scope or reach of central government and to strengthen its authority by moving executive agencies controlled by the centre down to lower levels in the political system’. With deconcentration, the central government retains its authority, and merely relocates its officers in different areas or levels within the national territory.<sup>114</sup> In contrast, devolution ‘cedes control of such agencies and resources to political actors and institutions at lower levels. It is always a form of power-sharing between central government and sub-national authorities.’<sup>115</sup> Devolution implies legally defined areas of competence and taxation.

The use of ‘decentralisation’ with regard to the hubs is somewhat ambiguous and it is more accurate to describe what the hub has in part achieved as ‘deconcentration’, or building up regional capacity by creating more infrastructure and sending more security personnel to the countryside. Thus far, the Gbarnga hub remains an exercise in deconcentration of administrative authority; basic public security policy and budgetary allocation decisions continue to be made by central ministries in Monrovia. Decentralisation, in the sense of the devolution of decision-making authority and budget allocation authority, is not mentioned as part of the hub and is, in the view of certain respondents, many years away.

In order for real decentralisation to take place, local authorities will need to be delegated more authority and responsibility in key areas including security and justice, with the objective of making those areas of state responsibility more inclusive and more responsive to local

---

<sup>113</sup> International Monetary Fund, *Liberia: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper – Annual Progress Report*, p. 33.

<sup>114</sup> Richard C. Crook and James Manor, *Democracy and Decentralisation in South Asia and West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 6-7.

<sup>115</sup> Crook and Manor, p. 7.

needs. This includes participation of local communities and authorities in governance structures, as well as in community or public oversight mechanisms for police, offering them the opportunity to participate in or influence planning, budgeting, implementation and accountability decisions.

The third hypothesis underlying the hub concept was that they would help create physical presence of the Liberian state and more security in the outlying regions as UNMIL draws down. This is being partly achieved through the PSU forward-basing and confidence patrols. However the underlying problem, lack of sufficient regular LNP throughout the countryside is exacerbated by the logistical challenges and personnel shortages resulting from by a long-engrained pattern of low levels of resourcing for public services outside of Monrovia and structural disincentives that make rotations to the leeward unattractive, if not financially untenable, to many Liberian police officers. Moreover, the push to increase LNP presence throughout the country and the advantages enjoyed by specialised PSU and ERU officers draws off qualified and trained officers from less privileged yet essential units like the WACPS. While extension of state authority will remain an objective as UNMIL continues to draw down its forces, awareness of these unintended consequences might suggest, for example, that WACPS officers, as a specialised unit, are not paid poorly relative to ERU or PSU officers and that those based in the leeward would benefit from similar opportunities for professional development as Monrovia-based officers.

Fourthly, the hub was developed on the assumption that the accountability of justice and security providers would improve if the hub made it easier for the public to register complaints. The Gbarnga hub is contributing to accountability of justice and security providers in the form of a public outreach officer who is based at the hub to receive public complaints about personnel and convey those complaints to the appropriate mechanism for follow-up. Region-wide monitoring of complaints deposited and resolved, both before and after the establishment of the hub, should provide clearer indication of the impact of the mechanism. While raising awareness among Liberians of the mechanisms for lodging complaints against justice and security actors is a positive development, and facilitating the processing of those complaints through the outreach officer is an achievement, we received no information on whether there were commensurate efforts to improve actual police and judicial accountability and oversight mechanisms, whether via the investigation of complaints, enforcement and disciplinary measures, or parliamentary oversight. While putting in place a public point of contact for justice and security complaint mechanisms is a useful first step, the more fundamental challenge resides in creating more effective and enforced internal and external oversight mechanisms to hold justice and security actors to account,

including through the creation of local community oversight committees.

The fifth hypothesis held that the hub would strengthen cooperation and relationships between those justice and security actors operating from the hub on the one hand, and community-based services on the other. The impact of the Gbarnga hub on coordination with local community groups and NGOs was not evident at the time of the field research and there should be ongoing monitoring to determine how hub actors are facilitating a more community-driven approach to justice and security provision. Representatives of numerous smaller communities and community-based groups in the Gbarnga region appeared at that time to have little information on the hub, suggesting a need for greater outreach and public information.

In Liberia the public goods of security and justice are not delivered only (or even primarily) by the state, but through the combination of means of various actors and institutions. The co-existence of formal state and customary or non-state providers constitutes a hybrid system of justice and security. While this report has discussed the effort to strengthen the delivery by public actors, their reach is very limited in the leeward. Where state actors exist to offer security and justice services, other non-state actors, such as NGOs, community groups, village chiefs and elders, 'big men' and other private citizens may play critical roles in supplementing and facilitating those services. While various NGOs and civil society groups are filling gaps in justice and security delivery, these are not a viable long-term substitute for state capacity to provide basic public services to its population. UNMIL's transition and move towards withdrawal has been echoed in the planned and actual withdrawal of a number of international NGOs who define themselves as providing humanitarian assistance. It is unclear who, if anyone, will step in to provide the essential services that they are currently providing to fill the gaps in state provision of justice and security. The withdrawal of such NGOs threatens to reopen the critical gaps in service delivery to the local population, and raises questions about the sustainability of hub-based formal services.

## **Recommendations**

Some important lessons appear to have been learned by those involved in planning of the future hubs. The Gbarnga hub experience to date has apparently resulted in a shift in emphasis to prioritising service delivery over infrastructure development. Efforts will focus on upgrading existing infrastructure for subsequent hubs in preference to investing in the development of new infrastructure. Future hubs will also not likely locate Border Patrol Units at the hub, but deploy them closer to or at the border. As such, the meaning of the 'hub' has apparently evolved from its original literal sense as a physical concentration of infrastructure and co-location of service providers,

and becoming, through trial and error, a more figurative notion referring to a coordinated strategy and a concentration of efforts to build up existing relevant services within a region. There has been little discussion of this shift and future hubs would benefit from a more open discussion of how to optimally support, coordinate and find synergies in service delivery across justice and security actors in the remaining regions.

The location of the Gbarnga hub suggests another lesson to be learned. Many respondents felt it is too far from Gbarnga city, lying 5 km from the town and accessible by an unpaved road. Clients/users of the hub would need to find a means of transportation (motorbike taxi or car taxi), or more likely, walk to the hub. They are often likely to be accompanied by their children. Logistical challenges also arise for providers of services, given the lack of vehicles, to respond to incidents and to carry out duties involved in the delivery of justice or security, such as the transportation of victims, alleged perpetrators, witnesses and evidence. Other respondents believe that the hub is a manageable distance, and that over time Gbarnga city would develop towards the hub, through its stimulation of development in the areas surrounding the hub. As the full range of justice and security services become operational from the hub, access of citizens of Lofa, Nimba and Bong counties should be closely monitored, and remaining barriers to access addressed. In the short- to medium-term, the distance of the hub from the city would appear to pose significant logistical challenges, though this may well change over time. A question to be asked for planning and development of future hubs might be whether in each of the specific regional contexts it is more important to improve immediate access to services for the largest number of citizens, or whether a longer-term perspective is merited.

Moreover, while the hub initiative has so far produced some tangible advances in extending state presence in the leeward, systemic problems continue to afflict public security and access to justice for the inhabitants of Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties and in Liberia more widely. Thus, while the forward deployment of 51 PSU officers to Gbarnga appears to have improved security and public perceptions of security through quicker response capacity and through confidence patrols, these benefits remain limited because the PSU lacks sufficient mobility, with only one vehicle available for the PSU at the hub. There remain insufficient regular Liberia National Police officers deployed throughout region, and those who are present are under-resourced and poorly paid. The lack of adequate budgetary resources results in underequipped police – lacking vehicles but also basic office infrastructure, equipment and supplies in the rural areas – and hence impairs the capacity of regular LNP to perform basic functions, responding to and investigating crimes and insecurity in the community. Future planning of hubs should take into account these more systemic problems in the policing and justice sectors.

More fundamentally, people are being excluded from justice and security services in the Gbarnga hub region and throughout Liberia because of structural problems relating to weak presence of the relevant public service personnel and infrastructure, and how those few police and court officials who are present function in an environment of severe budgetary shortfalls. As described above, informal 'fees' are frequently imposed by police and/or court officials on victims in order to register a complaint, have an alleged crime investigated, and have a court case pursued. In other words, Liberians who have been victims of crime are required to pay fees at virtually every step of the criminal justice process. These fees may go to supplement the low income of police and court officials (petty corruption), and may be used to cover the costs associated with carrying out the basic policing and criminal justice duties, such as fuel and transportation costs to transport police or alleged perpetrators, or photocopying police reports for the preparation and hearing of court cases. In such a context, where the user of state policing and justice services must in practice finance part of the delivery of the service, those who cannot afford the fees are in practice denied the services. Potential users may also self-exclude, preferring to rely on customary and traditional providers of justice and security services, whether through lack of information, lack of trust or confidence in the formal system, or lack of means to pay the fees associated with the formal system. The widespread preference across Liberia and other sub-Saharan African states for customary and traditional providers suggest that the hub initiative and other efforts to extend state authority should seek to find more ways to work with informal systems to ensure justice and security needs of citizens are being met.

More also could have been done to gauge the security and justice needs of the populations of the three counties before planning and implementation of the first hub had commenced. The development and implementation of the hub appears in practice to have been largely top-down. While community activists and leaders of civil society organisations around Gbarnga seemed somewhat informed, our impressions were that either few people in the general population were aware of the intended functions of the hub, or it was vaguely described as a 'barracks' for police. Similarly, while certain NGO staff who were active in providing or supporting security and justice services were aware of the hub, others had vague or partial understandings. A number of ordinary citizens who we met were unaware of the hub, and had not been involved in the perception survey or engaged before or during the construction of the hub. We also heard from Gbarnga area respondents that well educated Liberians, such as students at the university, were largely uninformed about the hub. Effective public outreach will be critical once the hub is completed and all planned services become operational. For future hubs, public needs assessments should be undertaken much earlier in the planning and development process. Public outreach, awareness-raising and

communications efforts about the functions of the hub need to be increased as improvements to services are implemented.

The stated objective of the hub to improve service delivery not only implies attention to the presence and performance of local justice and security providers, but also increasing accountability of those actors to the people whom they serve – the population within their area of responsibility. Improving accountability should focus not only on creating a mechanism to facilitate, but on improving actual oversight and accountability procedures for the state's justice and security sector personnel.

Since the field research for this report was conducted, the Liberian government has also decided to arm regular Liberia National Police located at depots and stations throughout the country, in response to rising incidences of vigilante and mob violence. This marks a departure from the model of policing implemented over the past 11 years. The impact of this decision – for crime prevention and response as well as for community perceptions of regular LNP officers – should be closely monitored and the implications for the wider criminal justice system assessed. There are valid concerns of police and border control officers who must respond to crimes committed by armed individuals. However similar proposals to arm BIN officers at the Liberian borders have provoked concerns by local communities of greater potential for harassment by security forces, particularly of women.<sup>116</sup> Measures to arm LNP and BIN officers must be undertaken alongside parallel efforts to strengthen professionalism, effective disciplinary procedures and accountability for misconduct.

Finally, it is not clear how sustainable the hub will be once the infrastructure is completed and, as UNMIL draws down and eventually withdraws, the attention of the international community declines. Recent Government of Liberia promises to allocate extra funding to security and justice services are an encouraging sign, but must be implemented and sustained over the medium- to long-term if the opportunity to improve local security and justice delivery that is presented by the hub initiative will realise its potential. Those involved in future hub development should seek to instrumentalise the hubs' mobilising potential to attract attention and resources to improving security and justice service delivery in the leeward, and better ensure sustainability over the medium term. This would mean maintaining an open and transparent process of learning, planning and implementation so that the lessons of the hub initiative can be widely observed and, if merited, adopted elsewhere.

---

<sup>116</sup> 'Summary of the visit of H.E. Mr. Staffan Tillander', Para 38.



## Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Established in 1959, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs [NUPI] is a leading independent research institute on international politics and areas of relevance to Norwegian foreign policy. Formally under the Ministry of Education and Research, NUPI nevertheless operates as an independent, non-political instance in all its professional activities. Research undertaken at NUPI ranges from short-term applied research to more long-term basic research.

### About the Author

**Marina Caparini** has from 2010-2014 been Senior Research Fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, where she has conducted applied, policy-relevant research in the area of policing and security and justice governance in post-authoritarian and post-conflict environments. Her recent projects have included an assessment of the police and criminal justice system in Guinea to inform US INL/State Department programming, a review of the police dimension of the Norwegian MFA's 'Training for Peace Programme' to build African civilian and police peacekeeping capacities, and a background paper on police capacity-building

### NUPI

Norwegian Institute of International Affairs  
C.J. Hambros plass 2D  
PO Box 8159 Dep. NO-0033 Oslo, Norway  
[www.nupi.no](http://www.nupi.no) | [info@nupi.no](mailto:info@nupi.no)

and development in the context of the UN's Strategic Guidance Framework for International Police Peacekeeping. She was previously Deputy Director of the Security System Reform Program at the International Center for Transitional Justice, and formerly Senior Fellow at the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces. She holds a PhD in War Studies from King's College London