

April 2012

Freedom through Association: Assessing the Contributions of Female Police Staff Associations to Gender-Sensitive Police Reform in West Africa

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Executive Summary

Security sector reform (SSR) is a key element in the state-building process. SSR traditionally focuses on re-equipping and re-training security sector institutions, changing policies and practices, and creating oversight mechanisms in contexts emerging from conflict or oppressive regimes. Little focus is placed on changing the culture within the security sector in favour of inclusivity and rights for women and minorities. Moreover, little attention is paid to what internal actors can do to ensure that this type of progress occurs.

This is changing. A small body of literature exists on the role that police associations for minority and female police officers can play in changing the culture of policing. Situated within the security sector and therefore enjoying the support of police staff associations, female police associations are well placed to take concrete steps toward achieving women and minority rights.

This study explores what women are doing in police services to change the nature of their work in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ghana. It reveals that, while female police staff associations are not overtly contributing to security sector reform, they are contributing to changing the culture of policing and assisting female officers assert themselves within the service. The supporting role the associations' play — while not explicit — provides female officers with the means to challenge the system. Support networks, regular meetings and burden sharing through welfare activities builds confidence among female police in the face of negative stereotypes and traditional gender roles that can hinder a woman's advancement in non-traditional professions. Female police associations have the capacity to do more concrete work – for example, launching mentorship programs for junior female officers and engaging in sectoral reform monitoring efforts. Moreover, female associations have solid perspectives on what needs to be changed within the policing system that directly disadvantages women. Encouragingly, all three associations of female police studied have the ability to further the SSR process, have a concerted interest in improving their services and broadening their membership base, and have the drive to do so.

Key policy recommendations of our research for female police associations, police services and other key stakeholders to improve the contributions of female police associations to changing the culture and effectiveness of security sector reform are:

- Creating partnerships with female associations in the broader security sector to improve training, knowledge-sharing, advocacy, and sectoral monitoring and reform efforts;
- Actively combating barriers for women by supporting public and internal education campaigns; and
- Listening to input from female police associations about security sector policies that could affect women and addressing the many complaints from women officers in the service in a transparent and meaningful manner.

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Acknowledgments

Special thanks goes to my research consultants; Caroline, Aisha and Akosua for going above and beyond what was required to organize field work and to review the research project at all stages. I could have not have conducted this research without the support of Jennifer Salahub, Fragile and Conflict Affected States Theme Leader at NSI. Furthermore, this project would have never been completed without the assistance of NSI colleagues, Karine LeBlanc, and Diane Guèvremont. I would like to thank Rodney Schmidt, Research Director, and Joe Ingram, President for their strategic guidance. Special acknowledgement is due to Anike Doherty and Aiko Holvikivi with the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) for their assistance and feedback on the project.

Most importantly thanks are due to all interviewees and focus group discussion participants for their time and insights and to the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) for its financial support and DCAF for its financial and substantive support. Without these groups, this project would not have been possible.

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Acronyms

CDIID - Complaint, Discipline and Internal Investigation Department (Sierra Leone)
CPA – Comprehensive Peace Agreement (Liberia)
CSO – Civil Society Organization
DCAF – Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces
DFID – Department for International Development
DOVVSU – Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (Ghana)
GBV – Gender Based Violence
GHS – Ghanaian Cedi
GIZ – Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)
GPS – Ghana Police Service
IAWP – International Association of Women Police
IDRC – International Development Research Centre
IGP – Inspector General of Police
LIFLEA – Liberia Female Law Enforcement Association
LINLEA – Liberia National Law Enforcement Association
LNP – Liberia National Police
LNPWA – Liberia National Police Women’s Association
LPPB – Local Police Partnership Boards (Sierra Leone)
LRD – Liberian Dollar
MOI – Ministry of Interior (Ghana)
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
NSI – The North-South Institute
POLAS – Police Ladies Association (Ghana)
RSLAF – Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces
SGBV – Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SLL – Sierra Leonean leone
SLP – Sierra Leone Police
SLPFSA – Sierra Leone Police Female Staff Association
SSR – Security Sector Reform
SSI – Security Sector Institution
UN – United Nations
UNAMSIL – United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNIPSIL – United Nations Integrated Peace Office in Sierra Leone
UNMIL – United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNSCR – United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNPOL – United Nations Police
US – United States
WAPWA – West African Police Women’s Association
WIPSEN-A – Women, Peace and Security Network-Africa
WISS-SL – Women in the Security Sector – Sierra Leone
WONGOSOL – Women’s NGO Secretariat of Liberia

Introduction

The overarching aim of security sector reform (SSR) is to create a security and justice sector that is respectful of human rights, democratically controlled, inclusive and makes security and justice accessible to all. In contexts where reform is taking place — commonly conflict-affected states or states emerging from oppressive regimes — most attention is paid to the national army during these processes. Yet it is the police, of all formal security sector institutions, who have the greatest impact on a nation's population; in most cases, they are the main purveyors of public security. In fragile contexts, however, the trust between civilians and police is often shattered. At worst, used as personal militia or an occupying national army by governing bodies, the police have carried out brutal atrocities against targeted groups. At best, they are perceived by the population as useless and corrupt (Tankebe 2008). Police reform can have a great effect on the stabilization of a country and improve its efforts to rebuild or remodel into a state that serves the best interests of its population.

A group that is often left out of security sector decision-making, and under-represented in security sector institutions (SSIs), is women. This is changing with the adoption of international agreements, protocols, and action plans such as United Nations' Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace, and security (UNSC 2000). Now SSR processes at least provide some gender inclusivity through attempts to make the policies and practices of security services more gender sensitive and to increase the number of women with decision-making power within SSIs, justice, and governance structures.

Yet by and large, SSR is still delivered in an *ad hoc* fashion, with limited donor coordination or local ownership of the process (OECD 2007). There is overemphasis on re-structuring, re-training, and re-equipping the police at the expense of changing the culture of policing, including shaping security institutions into more gender sensitive organizations. Gender is often added to SSR programs as an afterthought and, therefore, structural issues that could inhibit a women's performance within a SSI are not truly addressed (Mobekk 2010). To re-structure security institutions effectively into public services, stakeholders should investigate a number of vehicles for change and oversight, including those that are present within the police service. One of those vehicles is the police union or staff association.

Gender and Police Reform

In a functioning state, the police are the public security providers. They are both the deterrent and the first responder to criminal activity. Their role is to make the public feel not only safe and secure in their day-to-day lives, but also comfortable seeking police services. How well police function in this role is a barometer of how much the state values the security and rights of its population (Caparini and Marenin 2004). In fragile, oppressive, or conflict-affected contexts, the police may represent the arm of the dominant party that wishes to maintain power; their actions may not be in the interests of the population but in those of a small, powerful elite. As a result, police may engage in brutal repression of populations, including perpetrating sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In many contexts, police also tend to be predominantly male. The few women among them rarely occupy decision-making roles. Instead, they are often found in more “culturally appropriate” positions such as administration. If they are part of operations, they are in positions that concern “women and children” such as guarding female perpetrators or dealing with domestic violence or child abuse.

SSR involves the restructuring, re-equipping, and retraining of all SSIs in contexts that are emerging from conflict or restructuring after oppressive regimes.¹ During this process more nuanced policies that take

¹ According to OECD DAC Guidelines, the overarching objectives of SSR are i) establishment of effective governance, oversight and accountability in the security system; ii) improved delivery of security and justice services; iii) development of local leadership and ownership of the reform process; iv) sustainability of justice and security service delivery (OECD 2007). SSIs referred to include, but are not limited to, national armies, police, border services, corrections, fire service and intelligence.

into account gender, minority and human rights are created to make the police service more representative as well as responsive to the population they serve. This may involve the inclusion of women at all levels and in all roles within the police. From a gender equity standpoint, the meaningful inclusion of both men and women in the security sector changes the balance of power and contributes to equality. On a practical level, women may have access to information and areas where men may not; for example, in conservative settings, men may not be able to interview female victims or witnesses to crime. Yet simply increasing women's employment in the police service cannot improve performance; women's participation in police services and gender responsive policing are not necessarily the same thing. Gender sensitivity is as much a mindset as it is a structural shift. Therefore, it must involve changes in policies and structures, but also in practices and police culture.²

Changing the culture of an SSI is an under-addressed aspect of SSR. The focus remains on equipping and technically training police officers. Policing, however, is steeped in its own culture and requires specialized context-specific approaches to change (Peake and Marenin 2008). So much about policing depends on the trust and camaraderie identified as a "separate brotherhood" (Sklansky 2006). For groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, this "brotherhood" could be difficult to break into. This is a problem faced not only in conflict-affected and fragile contexts but also by police services globally. Studies primarily focused on North American and European police services show that a dominant male and white culture prevails, with members of minority groups and women often having to choose whether they want to represent their culture or "be a woman" (possibly both), or whether they want to be a police officer (Sklansky 2006).

Police services are, indeed, becoming more diverse, moving away from being representative of only dominant groups to include minorities and women. Yet, there is a concern that these demographic changes may be only cosmetic, as new recruits succumb to the overarching culture "blue is blue" (Sklansky 2006). The experience of policing for female officers is different from that of men for example. Harassment of women is common. A study that surveyed the perception of police women in the United States showed that, because of this harassment, women felt less welcome on the job than men (Seklecki and Paynich 2007). Worse, female police believe that they need to adapt to this culture, which includes lewd jokes and banter. Even the positive aspects of police culture, such as peer support and trust, are male dominated, requiring women to adapt to the ways men bond and establish power structures. To counter this, minority and women's police unions and associations have emerged to assert rights and recognition where the police do not adequately represent their needs or viewpoints (Berry *et al.* 2008).

Female police officers have recognized the need for special representation for almost a century. The International Association of Women Police (IAWP), a global group of female police officers and female police staff associations, was established in 1915. Since then, police unions and staff associations for women have been formed all over the world. These associations share much in common, beginning with structure.³ Most have an executive made up of members nominated or self-nominated for various positions. Decisions are made by voting or delegated by the president. Membership is usually open to all active and retired officers, and those affiliated with the police organization. In some cases, such as the IAWP, membership is also open to male officers as well as civilians who work in the police service (IAWP 2010). Most female police staff associations are supported by membership dues, collected monthly or yearly, although some in developing areas are donor supported. Importantly, these associations also share a common goal of bringing gender equity to the police service.

² For more information on gender sensitive SSR, please see Bastick (2008) and Mobekk (2010). For gender and police, specifically, please see UNIFEM (2007).

³ For an excellent overview of structure and roles of female staff association in the security and justice globally, please see Montgomery (2011).

Although the goals of women's police associations may be similar, their approaches and mandates differ. Roles and activities include providing a network and building relationships, identifying training needs, and sponsoring women for training. Associations also organize moral support groups and social activities, such as birthday parties, provide support to families of fallen officers, and provide recognition through awards for women in service, including civilian support staff.

Female police staff associations have achieved some success in furthering gender-sensitive police reform and achieving greater equality in the workplace. Some take an active role in pushing for commitment to international, regional, and national agreements on gender equity, as well as providing support to other women's law enforcement associations. The mandate of Mozambique's Police Women's Network, for example, includes ensuring that the South African Development Community Declaration on Gender and Development is implemented, in addition to promoting the rights and needs of women police officers and reducing discrimination against them (Montgomery 2011). South Africa's police association assumes a similar watchdog role to ensure equity and emancipation (Berry et al. 2008).

Lobbying and advocacy can be difficult, as the ability of female police staff associations to influence the way in which police services and the wider security structure function may be hindered. A key barrier is a lack of political will on the part of security services, or even the state, to allow these associations to exist.⁴ Male dominance within the sector also contributes to ignorance about why female staff associations are needed, particularly where general police associations exist (Montgomery 2011). Women are not expected to aspire to leadership positions or fight discrimination.⁵ Even well-established organizations in North America and the United Kingdom face this issue, with many viewing female staff associations as radical feminist institutions.⁶ Moreover, women are still fighting expectations that they maintain traditional gender roles, even when female officers hold high ranks within police services. Although these difficulties can be discouraging, they provide more reason for female police staff associations to exist and to partner with other associations, both regionally and globally.

Despite barriers, advocacy and lobbying efforts have achieved improvements in police policies and practices and even in laws that recognize the specific needs of men and women. For example, the British Association for Women and Policing successfully lobbied for changes to fitness requirements and administrative and policy barriers facing women in the police service including restrictive uniforms (BAWP 2008). The Ghana Police Ladies Association (POLAS) managed to have domestic violence considered a crime, and female police in South Africa have pushed for equipment and uniforms that better meet the needs of female officers (Hendricks and Sphokazi 2010, Montgomery 2011). Associations recognize that when change occurs, the achievement is not limited to women in that location. Perhaps one of the responsibilities of the associations should be to use changes as precedents to further the global rights of and respect for women in security. Every time advancement for one police woman is achieved, it is advancement for all police women everywhere (Anderson 2011).

Background research suggests that associations and federations of police provide a valuable support structure. Moreover, for under-represented groups such as women and minorities, they have a further advantage in monitoring police services and possibly general associations. This ensures that the aspects of police culture that are not sensitive to the specific needs of these populations change.

⁴ The International Labour Organization (ILO) declares that collective bargaining and freedom of association are basic employment rights that are needed to build democratic governance. Yet, the ILO is vague on the topic of SSIs. Although it supports the rights of labourers and workers to form unions and collectively bargain, the *right* is not extended to public security services. It is up to individual nation states to permit associations to exist (ILO 2002). In Africa, police unions and associations are permitted in some countries (primarily former English and Portuguese colonies), but not in others (primarily former French colonies) (Montgomery 2011).

⁵ Interview with Sandra Oder, Researcher with the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) on May 19 2011.

⁶ Interview with Isobel Anderson, Association Liaison for the Ontario Women in Law Enforcement (OWLE) on June 3 2011.

Most research in this area is based in North America, Europe, Australia, and South Africa. With the exception of South Africa, research on the contribution of police unions to changing police services is not set within a context of police reform. Yet anecdotal evidence suggests that female staff associations play a role in shaping the new police culture in countries that are undergoing police reform, including those that have experienced violent conflict. Previous research conducted by the North-South Institute (NSI) points to the role that the Liberia Female Law Enforcement Association (LIFLEA), an umbrella security sector association for female staff members, played in advocating for more women in decision-making roles in the police service during the initial stages of the police reform process (Salahub 2011). This prompted NSI researchers to continue investigating to determine whether more female staff associations in the security sector had made this contribution, what other roles they played, and whether they were continuing to advocate for changes. The research conducted led us to hypothesize that female staff associations were making a positive contribution to gender sensitive, democratic SSR.

Definitions and Case Selection

For the purpose of this project, female police staff associations are defined as formal organizations, networks, committees, bodies and unions that seek to promote and support women involved in the policing sector — in active duty or in supporting roles — and the contributions⁷ women make to policing. The bodies should have a common governing structure and may not comprise of only women, but they must be primarily focused on the concerns of women in policing institutions. They may also function at the local, regional, national and international levels.

In this report, gender means the cultural or societal roles ascribed to male and female people. Thus, gender equality means that the rights and opportunities of men, women, girls and boys are not governed by whether they were born male or female. Other terms that may need clarification in this paper include gender mainstreaming, which is a process of achieving gender equality, gender-based violence (GBV), which is defined as “any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on a socially ascribed [gender] differences between females and males”, and sexual violence, which refers to unwanted violent sexual acts that include but are not limited to rape, incest, attempted rape, sexual exploitation, and sexual assault (IASC 2008). Sexual violence and GBV are commonly amalgamated into one acronym standing for sexual and gender based violence – or SGBV.

This report presents three case studies of female police staff associations in the national police services of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ghana. These three West African countries have experienced or are undergoing individual police reform processes, but share a number of commonalities. In the 1990s, Sierra Leone and Liberia shared almost symbiotic civil conflicts. The subsequent peace processes in 2002 and 2003 included SSR mandates, including police reform. In both countries, the police were used by the regime as a repressive force and were implicated in the conflicts. However, subsequent differences were stark: Sierra Leone underwent an involved SSR process led by the United Nations, which included community consultation, whereas Liberia experienced a devolved process, with donors contracting SSR to private security firms and the United Nations, without much interaction with community actors. In contrast, Ghana’s SSR process followed the end of its military regime in 1992. Through a whole-of-government democratization initiative that lasted a decade, the security sector was one of many institutions reformed to represent a new democratic state.

Although Liberia is the only country out of the three that has a strategic quota for female officer recruitment,⁸ the reform processes in all case studies have included a move to increase the representation

⁷ Indicators of contributions may include advocacy, training, mentorship, pushing for gender-responsive service delivery, oversight, supporting female participation through social welfare networks, among other things.

⁸ Despite the lack of a hard quota, Sierra Leone’s National Gender Strategic Plan (2010-2013) set a 30% target for the percentage increase they wanted to see among women recruited and retained in SSIs. The government is also working to pass a Gender Equality bill.

of women in the police service (Valasek 2010). Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Ghana are the only countries in West Africa to have both gender policies for the police and women's police associations. Although success in state-building has varied among these countries, the integration of gender-sensitive reforms has been universally slow.

Other characteristics shared by the three countries are weak civilian oversight and relations with civil society, cited as a barrier to police reform. Without strong civilian oversight or internal watchdogs, police policies, procedures, and practices are minimally monitored (Hutchful 2008, Jaye 2008, Kondeh 2008). Although Ghana was not affected by conflict, it faces similar problems implementing security reform. Comparisons between the two contexts (conflict affected and non-conflict affected) allow findings and policy recommendations to be widely applicable.

The three case studies presented in this report follow a similar structure. They review the SSR process in each country followed by a specific review of the gender-sensitive policy and practical changes made. Each association's structure, roles and activities are explained along with its major achievements. In addition, partnerships between the associations and other stakeholders are described if relevant. The studies review the challenges and changes that police women are facing and whether their staff associations feature in supporting them through these challenges. Finally, the studies look at the future of these organizations as envisioned by female police officers and relevant stakeholders. Each study offers its' own analysis of the context.

In the next section, we present a comparative analysis of the cases, followed by detailed case studies on each of the three countries. The concluding chapter includes practical and policy suggestions directed at the individual police associations, police services and relevant stakeholders at the national and international levels.

Similarities and Differences: Comparing Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ghana

This comparative analysis looks at the differences and similarities among the three staff associations in Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone. A review of the structure, roles, activities, and accomplishments of the associations is presented from the perspectives of their members, public servants, civil society members, and international stakeholders. This review leads to an analysis of whether associations are contributing to gender sensitive SSR and if so, what they could do to increase their impact.

Differences

The three case studies present a spectrum from active to less active associations, and there are stark contrasts between them. The Ghana Police Services' POLAS is undoubtedly the most developed and active. The Sierra Leone Police Female Staff Association (SLPFSA) meets and provides welfare services, but lacks the capacity and ability to expand its services. The Liberia National Police Women's Association (LNPWA) is less active, although the secretariat remains intact and dues are being collected and used for welfare payments. Both Sierra Leone and Liberia have umbrella female staff associations for women in the security sector, but they are, for all intents and purposes, inactive. Leadership, organizational structure, organizational and member capacity, fundraising ability, and relevance to membership bodies are all areas where the associations differ greatly.

Leadership/Oversight — Both Sierra Leone and Liberia face issues with leadership at both the level of the police association and the umbrella security sector association. Much of the success and leadership of both associations is vested in one senior female police officer, and tasks are not shared. In contrast, although members of the POLAS executive are overworked, roles are shared, including by members outside the executive.⁹ Still, all three associations face internal challenges in terms of leadership. Members of POLAS complain that the practice of appointing the most senior ranking female officers to head the national and regional chapters does not necessarily result in willing candidates for those positions. Currently, there do not appear to be any legitimacy issues with the un-elected Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of POLAS, but this could change as the organization grows.

Oversight of the executive by members exists in the cases of Sierra Leone and Ghana, while the LNPWA has a Board of Directors. POLAS would like to have one consisting of civil society members and police officers to improve lobbying efforts.

Membership — Mandatory versus non-mandatory membership is an issue all three organizations grapple with, but it is treated differently in all three cases. In both Ghana and Sierra Leone, new female police officers are automatically inducted into the female staff association when they graduate from police training. However, payment of dues is optional in Sierra Leone, but automatic and mandatory in Ghana. In Liberia, joining the LNPWA is voluntary, although the association would like to change that. While mandatory membership helps raise funds, it may result in an unengaged mass of members. Alternatively, the Liberian model encourages involvement of an engaged membership. Paid-up members are members with a vested interest in participating in the association. Questions around effectiveness, but also about the drive and independence of the associations, can come into question depending on how its membership is generated.

Influence — Whether membership is mandatory or voluntary, the reach of the various associations outside the capital varies. POLAS has a wide-reaching membership base that includes all regions. Sierra Leone and Liberia do not have the same reach, with SLPFSA only active in a few areas and the LNPWA,

⁹ For example, the officer who is heading the proposed mentorship program is not an executive member.

for the most part, capital city based. This observation also extends to the umbrella organizations in Sierra Leone and Liberia — Women in the Security Sector-Sierra Leone (WISS-SL) and LIFLEA — whose activities and membership are capital city centric, or even headquarters centred, and, in the case of Sierra Leone, dominated by one security institution.¹⁰

Organizational development — POLAS is far more advanced than the SLPFSA and the LNPWA. POLAS conducts annual strategic planning as well as financial auditing, whereas the associations in Sierra Leone and Liberia do not. At the national level, the SLPFSA is without a bank account, making accountability weak. For Liberia and Sierra Leone, lack of organizational and financial planning is a result of a lack of funds, lack of capacity, and, in the case of Sierra Leone, lack of sufficient support from the SLP executive.¹¹ It must be stated that POLAS's relative advantages in this area may be a result of 20 years without a civil war to build solidarity.

Financial support — The level of sophistication of association management is related to their ability to support themselves financially. For POLAS there is recognition that a number of methods are required to obtain revenues, and its fundraising efforts have been diversified to include both corporate donations and partnerships. In contrast, the SLPFSA and the LNPWA rely on dues and small-scale, community-based fundraising to support their activities. Funding is highlighted as a shortcoming in these two organizations and it is clear they need to diversify and scale up their funding sources. This is particularly important as neither association collects dues by payroll debit. Both could learn from POLAS, not only with regard to fundraising, but also how to raise their profiles.

None of the staff associations receive funding from international donors. At the national level, the associations in Liberia and Ghana see this as a possibility, although Liberians say they lack capacity to solicit funding. The SLPFSA does not see donor funding or civil society partnerships as possibilities because of its relationship with the SLP management.

External image — The profile of the association can contribute to its ability to fundraise effectively. The SLPFSA and the LNPWA are not known outside the police service, and sometimes not even internally. POLAS, on the other hand, is known throughout West Africa by female police officers and civil society organizations (CSOs) alike. It is active within the community and vocal in the press and, therefore, a household name within Ghana.

Professional needs — POLAS is more proactive in reviewing the roles, responsibilities and actions of the association and seeking professional and organizational development, however this is approached more reluctantly in Sierra Leone and Liberia. All three associations have identified areas where there is the need to enhance capacity and policing skills of their members, yet they do not actively seek training or opportunities for training. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, the SSR experience has provided a number of external opportunities for training with the provision of per diems, travel allowances, meals, and in some cases international travel. This leaves limited uptake of internal professional development opportunities that address some of the capacity deficiencies of female police officers, but do not include the benefits attached to external training. Although NGOs and CSOs have offered assistance to associations in both countries in addition to training events and workshops, these have not been pursued.¹²

¹⁰ Interviewees stated that WISS-SL is dominated by members of the armed forces.

¹¹ SLPFSA at headquarters must obtain permission from the SLP Executive to have a bank account and to conduct activities. In contrast, their counterparts at the regional level have more leeway and are permitted to have bank accounts.

¹² The Women, Peace and Security Network-Africa (WIPSEN-A) has offered assistance to umbrella associations in both Sierra Leone and Liberia, but neither association has approached WIPSEN-A to accept the offer. WIPSEN-A sees the relationship as one-way, with NGOs continuously proposing or offering their expertise, but associations never asking for assistance or seeking collaboration. The Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL) has also spoken with LIFLEA and the LNPWA regarding workshops and collaborative opportunities with no uptake.

Conversely, Ghanaian female police officers will take advantage of opportunity for professional development and have been in discussion with regional NGOs for assistance in setting up an umbrella female security staff association. In addition, they do not make the provision of a per diem or meals a requirement for their attendance. Female police officers in Liberia and Sierra Leone are interested in professional development, but they face bureaucratic hurdles and bias in the internal selection process. This is compounded by a donor-provided training structure that has created negative incentives for officers seeking training that is truly needed in lieu of opportunities that may supplement income or prestige. It should be noted that female police officers in Liberia and Sierra Leone earn less than those in Ghana, but, on the other hand, Ghanaian police officers have not received the same level of donor attention as their conflict-affected neighbours.

Although female police officers in Liberia and Sierra Leone are asking for more training, specific care should be taken to determine the type of training they are interested in and whether options already exist. Any new interventions should promote self-initiated development at the individual and organizational levels. Much existing professional training is conducted through quick-impact workshops, which do not build capacity, trust, and good habits. Instead, long-term, technical assistance programs should be considered if donors and other stakeholders are willing to support these activities in the future.

Gender awareness — The levels of gender awareness among members differs between associations. In Ghana, for example, there is general satisfaction among female police officers with the achievements of women, and a perceived lack of need for raising gender awareness within the service. This is in contrast with the views of outside stakeholders and several senior female police officers in Ghana who expressed frustration that more female police are not cognizant of gender imbalances and gender discrimination. Civil society members and some senior female officers have complained that because Ghana did not experience violent conflict, citizens are not as gender aware as countries that did, suggesting that without extreme brutality at the hands of men, the general population is unable to consider women in roles traditionally held by men. This is in stark contrast to Liberia, where female officers were very aware of discriminatory practices that disempower women within the police service and where the population has turned to female leaders as an alternative to men.

Relevance — All three associations face the challenge of remaining relevant to their members. Yet, the challenges faced by the LNPWA and, to some extent, the SLPFSA are existential. The LNPWA has been inactive for some time and the SLPFSA is overly dependent on the Sierra Leone Police (SLP). An inability to provide services that members are requesting in exchange for their dues, with exception of welfare activities, could skew the importance of these organizations for junior officers seeking support internally. A crisis of leadership in Liberia's LNPWA as well as LIFLEA is particularly worrying, as, without these organizations, there is limited internal advocacy for women's rights and advancement within the Liberia National Police (LNP). Although POLAS does not face legitimacy issues, members expressed frustration that more is not done by way of lobbying for women's rights internally.

Similarities

Despite different levels of organizational development, all three police associations share a number of attributes, mainly structurally, in service delivery, and mandates. To varying degrees, they have similar shortcomings in communications, relevance to members, and efforts to support younger female officers. They also do not take advantage of civil society resources and the opportunities they can provide. This is in terms of advocacy support as well as professionally-focused activities to assist in achieving the aims of their police service's gender policies and national and international commitments to gender equity.

Structure — Structurally, the three organizations are similar, with executive committees providing general oversight. Regional chapters mimic the composition of the national executive committee and

maintain links with the national body. The positions, roles and responsibilities, as well as limits of the executive committees and members' powers are outlined in constitutions, which all three associations have, although the LNPWA is without a written document.

Activities — All three associations are primarily social and welfare groups. Their primary purpose is to provide financial and in-kind support to fellow female officers facing the death of a family member or illness, as well as celebration of childbirth, marriage, and retirement. They organize events to build camaraderie as well as to fundraise. These social activities promote networking, which is highlighted as a function in all three associations. Social events and meetings provide opportunities for junior officers to interact more with senior officers in an informal environment. In some cases, these events involve male colleagues, encouraging men to be allies of the association. Indeed in Sierra Leone, departments including both men and women compete to host meetings because they gain directly from the social event that follows the administrative portion of the meeting.

Two areas where all three associations fall short is advocacy and lobbying. Although each association is mandated to advocate on behalf of its members, their efforts are weak. Much can be attributed to the lack of confidence women have in their positions. Senior female police officers do not feel comfortable visibly fighting for women's promotion, lest they lose their own jobs in the process. Yet, this is a key role that the associations should be focused on or, at the very least, look for creative alternatives to presenting the association as the face of female police advocacy.¹³

Mentorship — Support for other female officers is cited as one of the main functions of all three associations. Yet, police officers in the case study locations lack access to role models and practical career advice. Women appear to be competing rather than supporting each other's advancement. This is detrimental to female police advancement within the organization, as well as solidarity and their confidence as police officers. In Ghana, POLAS has recognized this shortcoming and will be starting a pilot mentorship program at Ghana Police Service (GPS) headquarters. WISS-SL in Sierra Leone had a mentorship program that included police officers, but this stopped with the death of the association's former President. In general, the SLPFSA and the LNPWA need to become more functional before they can formally provide this service.

Mentorship is a crucial element in supporting younger female police officers, as confidence on the job is another shared issue. Female officers in all three locations say that women lack confidence in their job and their abilities. In Liberia, civil society members complain that this contributes to female officers engaging in even more corrupt activities than their male counterparts. Low levels of training and few opportunities for professional development were cited as contributing factors. Yet training can only partly bolster confidence in one's skills. Practical experience and a supportive environment are also needed. It is encouraging that members of all three associations attribute connectedness — provided through the association network and communication — as a support and confidence booster to female police officers.

Communication — Communication by the Association with members in all three associations is basic but effective. Each has the permission of its police service to make use of communication tools, such as police circulars, bulletins, and police radio to inform members of meetings and activities. In Ghana and Sierra Leone, these tools are used to disseminate minutes of meetings as well. In the future, all organizations would like to improve their communications, using newsletters as well as other media, and POLAS is looking to improve cell phone communication by partnering with private communications companies. Greater connectivity will improve networking and the ability of the associations to provide better support to their members.

¹³ An example would be to look at liaising with external bodies such as umbrella security sector associations or even women-focused NGOs and CSOs to conduct lobbying on behalf of the women in the police service.

Communication with external actors, however, is universally weak, and interactions with CSOs, NGOs, other government bodies, and international associations are limited. POLAS occasionally calls on service providers to conduct events and learning sessions for members. For example, one chapter brought in health practitioners to educate women about breast cancer and demonstrate how to conduct self-examinations.

All associations have links with other female staff associations in the justice and security sector. Other female association members are invited to police association activities and, in the case of LNPWA, they assist in choosing the executive. Moreover, in Liberia and Sierra Leone, umbrella staff associations encourage further cooperation and support. Indeed, Ghanaian female police officers would like to have an umbrella organization as well and look to their peers in Sierra Leone and Liberia for guidance.

Relation with the police service — An association's relationship with its police service varies slightly between the associations, but all appear to be supported on some level. The use of police office space, officers' time, police communications, and public statements show this. The SLPFSA, the association with the least autonomy from its police service, appears to receive the least amount of support internally.¹⁴ Although female associations are permitted at an institutional level, it is interesting in that all three countries police unions and general police staff associations are not permitted as they are seen as a national security threat. Female police staff associations on the other hand are seen as non-threatening.

Gender issues — Female officers share common hurdles in striving for gender equality within their organizations. Stereotypes depicting female officers as lazy and incompetent are common. Reaction to these is similar, with senior female police officers showing little sympathy for women who show weakness on the job. Only in Liberia do female police officers recognize that some stereotypes associated with women are linked to structural barriers. Problems — such as perpetuated traditional gender roles that require women to act as the primary care giver to children, possibly requiring them to shirk night shifts or resist transfers to locations away from their families — as well as the power hierarchies at play may result in women feeling that they have no option but to tolerate sexual harassment and advances from their male superiors. Compounding this are women's levels of education, particularly in Sierra Leone and Liberia, which are much lower than men's. This makes the pool of eligible candidates for recruitment to the police service smaller. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, this has resulted in positive discrimination of female applicants and lowered standards for recruitment and advancement, which contributes to negative stereotypes of incompetence.

The rate of sexual harassment and exploitation cannot be compared between organizations because of the sensitivity of the topic.¹⁵ This topic is still taboo, and it was difficult to elicit information. All three associations acknowledge that the problem exists, but state that it was more pervasive before reform initiatives. All three police services have internal offices that oversee professional standards and can be approached by a victim of sexual assault, abuse, exploitation, and harassment; yet, their impact is unknown. Members of all three associations mentioned that they support women who face domestic problems or difficult working environments; however, what they do in the case of SGBV or harassment is not fully known.

Achievements — Placing women in decision-making roles and opening up professional doors for them within a male-dominated profession are seen as the primary achievements of all three associations and

¹⁴ The SLPFSA does use SLP communication equipment and letterhead but requires permission to open a bank account and to conduct activities. The SLP Executive Management Board denied the SLPFSA the ability to directly debit dues from members' paycheques.

¹⁵ At this time, researchers are unable to deduce how often sexual harassment and exploitation occur, nor whether they are reported formally or informally, save for anecdotal evidence, which indicates that such incidents are greatly reduced, but still pervasive at least in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

their main contribution to the police reform process with respect to the advancement of women. Yet, the study found that there was often confusion between the achievements of women as individuals and those of the associations. This does not mean to discount the achievements of individual female police officers, but acknowledges that changes were due to the hard work of individuals, not necessarily acting as representatives of their female staff association. Thus, aside from nominal examples, there is no real proof that the female staff associations as a body are contributing tangibly to gender sensitive police reform or more democratic and respectful policing.

Questions then arise as to their relevance and whether they have the potential to contribute to change. While the associations themselves are not directly pushing for change, they create the conditions and support for female officers to assert themselves, and therefore, change the policies, practices and face of policing in their respective countries. The research shows, in this regard, that they are relevant and can contribute given the right encouragement, support and drive. Creating partnerships to improve training, knowledge-sharing and sectoral monitoring efforts; combating barriers for women by supporting public and internal education campaigns; and empowering female police associations to voice their opinions on security sector policies that could affect women, among other things, could go a long way to improving the contributions of female police associations to changing the culture and effectiveness of security sector reform.

More detailed analysis may be found in the case studies which follow.

Revitalizing the Liberia National Police Women's Association

In Liberia, the SSR process began in 2004, following 14 years of civil war. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was responsible for overseeing reform of the Liberia National Police, an organization implicated in gross human rights abuses, including SGBV, during the conflict. In 2003, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (Liberia 2003) (CPA) was signed in Accra, with Liberian women playing a major part in ensuring that the parties came to a final agreement and that the peace process allowed input from stakeholders other than the warring parties. Women were equally forceful in pushing for a greater role in governance and security. During this period, the Liberia National Police Women's Association (LNPWA) was crucial in changing the way women in the security sector operated and what they could achieve.

Liberia is considered a fragile context. Although the country's development and reconstruction is progressing, the country, like most fragile states, still falls behind in all development indicators.¹⁶ Women still lag behind in areas such as education and employment, and face cultural discrimination. Moreover, an estimated 60–70 per cent of Liberian women experienced sexual violence during the war, and violence against women remains a serious concern, with rape as one of the top human rights violations.

There is evidence of success in the SSR process in general. It is encouraging that security is not a major concern of the general population, except in Monrovia; the population is more concerned with human security needs such as access to clean drinking water. Although the SSR process is judged to be progressing well, it is faulted for not being inclusive of civil society or sensitive to the context in which it is based.¹⁷ Unlike its neighbour, Sierra Leone, Liberia still hosts a large peacekeeping contingent, and the ability of the police and armed forces to assume sole responsibility for security is questioned. Despite efforts to improve relations with the public, through community policing for example, the police are still largely seen as incompetent and corrupt.

The SSR process in Liberia has focused on professionalization of the police service, primarily through training and technical assistance. Policies, including those with a specific gender focus, and practices, such as establishment of the Professional Standards Division, have been developed to help the LNP become more accountable to the public. Yet, it is questionable whether these efforts have actually changed the culture within the police service to that of a transparent, democratic and respectful organization.

According to its mandate, the LNPWA appears to challenge the LNP's practices with regard to gender, but, in reality, the association is currently inactive. However, it is interesting to examine what the association has accomplished, whether it has changed the way in which the LNP operates, and whether an opportunity remains for the association to renew its status as an agent of change.

The LNPWA is not the only female staff association in the security sector, although it was the first. There is an umbrella body, the Liberia National Law Enforcement Association (LINLEA) with a women's wing, the Liberia Female Law Enforcement Association (LIFLEA). LIFLEA has members from every female staff association in the security sector. As a supra-institutional body, it should be well placed to push for female advancement at the national level. This association is also important to this study, as its role and relations with the LNPWA contribute to the current state of female staff associations and presence within the LNP.

¹⁶ No low-income state considered fragile has achieved any of the Millennium Development Goals. (Garrasi, "For fragile states, peacebuilding and statebuilding come before MDGs" 23 June 2011)

¹⁷ Interview with Thomas Jaye, former Head of Office, Liberia for the International Center for Transitional Justice, 9 Aug. 2011; Marpue Speare, executive director, WONGOSOL, 11 Aug. 2011.

In this case study, the current and past achievement, roles, and activities of the LNPWA and, to some extent, LIFLEA are investigated. This information is compared with the mandates of the associations as well as the goals of the SSR program to evaluate whether the association has contributed or could contribute to SSR including improving gender sensitivity. The study begins with brief background information on women in policing in Liberia, followed by an introduction to the LNPWA — its history, purpose, structure, past achievements, and current activities. Because of key changes in the methods used to collect information regarding the LNPWA (as outlined in the methods section in Appendix A), this case study will focus primarily on problems faced by the organization in maintaining its momentum and ways in which members and stakeholders have suggested it move forward. This chapter culminates with some analysis and suggestions for the LNPWA as well as stakeholders.

Reform of the Liberia National Police

Since 2004, the LNP has made great strides in improving its service, as reflected in changing its name from a police “force” to the Liberia National Police. Guidance for restructuring of the LNP is outlined in the CPA (Liberia 2003) and United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1509¹⁸ (UNSC 2003), with guiding principles enshrined in the Liberian constitution of 1986. Responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the police reform program falls to the United Nations Police (UNPOL), working with the government and other national and international stakeholders, until national bodies are able to take over the process.

The initial outline for reform of the police service was not overly specific: it stipulated the immediate reform and transformation of the LNP into a professional police service that espouses democratic values and respect for human rights, and is non-partisan and incorrupt (Liberia 2003). The existing police force was immediately disbanded, which meant that all police officers, regardless of rank, had to reapply to the LNP under stricter recruitment standards.¹⁹ Those who did not wish to reapply were given a severance package. A police-wide vetting process was conducted after the CPA was signed to ensure that police who were rejoining the service had not committed human rights abuses.²⁰

The reform process took into account the need to improve relations between the police and communities, particularly women and children, by establishing new units to improve community security and communications. Specifically, the Women and Children Protection Section that addresses SGBV and child abuse, improving survivor care and lessening the stigma associated with both crimes, and the Community Policing Section that works directly with communities to develop a locally-generated approach to security.²¹ Other measures, such as the creation of a Professional Standards Division to deal with the internal conduct of police officers and public complaints, show a commitment to improving police image and professionalism, although the division is not fully functional.²²

Criticisms of the reformed LNP include a low level of motivation among officers, ineffective and insufficient training leading to poor capacity, and a limited presence in some parts of the country. This is compounded by limited resources, such as flashlights, radios, and vehicles (ICG 2009). Legislation focused on SSR has been slow and difficult to pass. Liberian civil society was sidelined during the

¹⁸ “3(n) to assist the transitional government of Liberia in monitoring and restructuring the police force of Liberia, consistent with democratic policing, to develop a civilian police training programme, and to otherwise assist in the training of civilian police, in cooperation with ECOWAS, international organizations, and interested States.”

¹⁹ The LNP lost a number of senior officers who did not reapply.

²⁰ Names of officers were printed in the newspaper and members of the public were invited to report suspected human rights abusers and war criminals. As photos were not provided and soldiers often went by nicknames during the war, it was difficult for the average Liberian to identify potential war criminals from the lists.

²¹ The Community Policing Section includes community police boards consisting of community members who meet regularly with the police, oversee police activity in their communities, and ensure that police are not only addressing the needs of the community, but that they are also doing it in a respectful manner.

²² Stakeholders complain about the lack of an ombudsperson-like position for the public to appeal to if they experience or witness police misconduct.

process, which was largely driven by the United Nations and the United States. Lawmakers have failed to use civilian oversight bodies designed to review security sector legislation to ensure that it is in line with the agreed reform process and is sensitive to concepts, such as gender, child, and minority protection. Oversight bodies must instead lobby the government to review legislation and provide comments back to lawmakers.²³

Women in Police

The SSR process in Liberia provided women with an exceptional opportunity to play a greater role within the security sector, not only in traditional administrative positions, but also in operational and decision-making capacities. Along with sweeping reforms of the security sector writ large, a gender policy was developed with the assistance of UNPOL (Bowah and Salahub 2011).

Before adoption of Liberia's National Action Plan under UNSCR 1325, the LNP was the only organization that had a gender policy that specifically addressed women in the security sector. The 2005 policy sought to improve gender parity, increase the number of women in decision-making roles, and continue to increase gender mainstreaming efforts. In addition, it called for improved survivor-centred policies and practices addressing SGBV. Implementation of this policy is overseen by the Gender Affairs Section, whose responsibilities include gender training; communication of gender-related policies, practices, and issues; monitoring SGBV and harassment cases internally; and assisting with the selection of female officers for promotion and recruitment (Griffiths 2011). As a result, female officers now hold senior positions, this included two female officers appointed to the positions of Inspector General and Deputy Inspector General respectively in the initial stages of the reform process.²⁴ The policy also aims for a 20 per cent quota of female officers within the LNP. Currently, approximately 15.42 per cent of officers are women and an estimated 4.31 per cent of senior positions are occupied by a female officer (Gaanderse and Valasek 2011).

Efforts to professionalize the LNP included raising the standards for recruitment and requiring candidates to have at least a grade 12 education. This reduced the pool of recruits considerably, especially the number of eligible women as according to a recent estimate, 44 per cent of the female population in Liberia has never attended school (USAID 2011), and of those who attend high school, only 18 per cent complete grade 12 (AllAfrica 2010). To attract more women to the LNP, physical and educational standards for them were lowered and an accelerated learning program following recruitment was introduced.²⁵ This led to an increase in the number of women within the institution from 5 per cent in 2007 to 15 per cent now, but not without a cost. Female recruits are perceived as less confident and competent than their male counterparts.

Still the number of female police officers remains low. Moreover, information about exactly what positions female officers hold in the security sector is difficult to obtain, making it impossible to ascertain whether significant numbers of women are moving into meaningful decision-making roles.²⁶ Nascent research has shown that, overall, most women in Liberian SSIs do not have decision-making power. This could be because recruitment of women with university degrees is low. The limited number of women who are high school or college graduates may have other work options and may not want to enter the

²³ At the time of writing, a National Security Act was being debated in government. This bill will overhaul the security sector, merging some institutions to reduce the number of actors. Civil society organizations, as part of the Security Sector Reform Working Group, lobbied extremely hard to see a copy of the bill, which appears non-gender sensitive and does not address critical issues, such as outdated police legislation.

²⁴ IGP Col. Beatrice Munah Sieh Browne and Deputy IGP Col. Asatu Bah-Kenneth

²⁵ The accelerated learning program was discontinued after 3 months – lack of access to continued education was another critique of the reform.

²⁶ In 2009, International Alert attempted to report on the percentage of women in SSIs, disaggregated to show whether women actually held decision-making roles. Although most SSIs will provide total numbers of women employed, their positions are considered classified information (pers. comm., Marpue Speare, executive director, WONGOSOL, 11 Aug. 2011).

police service because they are not paid during the two additional years they attend Police Academy.²⁷ Female recruitment and promotion are also hindered by negative stereotypes of female police officers. They are often viewed as lazy and incompetent, because of their lower recruitment standards, and, according to a focus group, as sexual objects. In some cases female police officers in Liberia are perceived by the public as more corrupt than their male counterparts.²⁸ Even women in the most senior positions have been publicly removed from office for alleged corrupt practices and abuse of office (Farley 2008).²⁹ Although a recent ICG report shows that corruption is endemic within the police service, allegations against the two most senior women have marred the perception of all policewomen (ICG 2011).

Female police officers are gender aware. Indeed the LNP provides all police officers with basic gender training at the Police Academy. Further specialized training is given to all supervisors, Police Academy trainers, and officers in the Women and Children Protection Service and Gender Affairs Section (Griffiths 2011). In addition, Liberia as a country has taken strides to mainstream gender awareness in all public services and areas of government. Liberia's National Gender Policy (2009), produced by the Ministry of Gender and Development, outlines strategic actions that should be taken to improve women's livelihoods, including devising and implementing affirmative action programs with special attention to training and mentoring and enforcing laws against gender discrimination. Strategic actions include continuing to build national capacity for gender mainstreaming in industries and services. The policy also ensures that international and national conventions signed by Liberia are implemented properly and encourages widespread public education on human rights.³⁰ These are all areas that the LNPWA can monitor to improve conditions and opportunities for women in the police service (Ministry of Gender and Development 2009).

The Liberian National Police Women's Association

The LNPWA was initially formed in 1993, near the end of the first Liberian civil war. It was created to counter discrimination against women and negative stereotypes of female police officers pervasive within the LNP, as well as push for increased female representation throughout the service. One commonly cited achievement by members is that it played a critical role in achieving the placement of women in decision-making positions and in pushing the LNP to become a more gender-inclusive organization. The LNPWA acted as the prototype for other female staff associations in SSIs in Liberia, such as the Ministry of National Security, and the LNP itself is still seen as the most progressive in terms of gender equity, with female police officers leading the Liberian peace effort and serving as a unifying force for the security sector.

The LNPWA creates a common community and instills a sense of unity among its members. Members see the association as an advocacy body that speaks on behalf of female police officers in a male-dominated environment. Mediating grievances is one area in which the LNPWA has played a role. When an active duty member is unable to see her direct supervisor about issues she faced on the job, for

²⁷ This is despite the fact that room and board are covered. Most female graduates find paid employment directly out of university and, therefore, do not want to attend further schooling in lieu of a paid salary. (Interview with Peter Zaizay, Deputy Minister for Administration, Liberian Ministry of National Security, on 8 Aug. 2011)

²⁸ Interview with Windor Dorko, Executive Director, FORHD (8 Aug. 2011)

²⁹ Both IGP Col. Beatrice Munah Sieh Browne and Deputy IGP Col. Asatu Bah-Kenneth have faced allegations of corruption and abuse of office.

³⁰ The Government of Liberia has signed, ratified, and committed to implementing several key international, regional, and national conventions and policies concerning gender equality and human rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; UNSCRs 1325, 1820, 1612 (children and armed conflict); the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the International Conference on Population and Development; the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women; the Millennium Development Goals; the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa; the New Partnership for Africa's Development; the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa; and Liberia's Domestic Relations Law, Inheritance Act (1998), rape law, Anti-Human Trafficking Act, National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, National Gender-based Violence Plan of Action, and Policy on Girl Education.

example, the association can counsel and advocate on her behalf. In addition, LNPWA members inspire officers to participate actively in improving the policing experience for all officers. One of the few roles the association maintains is providing support systems in times of need, such as sickness and death, and celebration, such as childbirth and marriage. Association members also still encourage officers to take on more challenging roles to improve their chances for promotion.

Professional development and connections with other women within the police service are also valuable roles that the LNPWA has played. This was done through networking events and specific training, such as computer education, in addition to police-wide gender sensitization training. The association has also worked to increase interdepartmental cooperation through co-ed sporting events. Activities were commonly held in the evenings, so that both female police officers and their partners could attend.

Yet, it is difficult to disassociate activities previously conducted by the LNPWA as an organization from those of individual members in their capacity as police officers rather than an association representative. For example, officers cited school outreach and community sensitization campaigns conducted in partnership with the Ministry of Education. Although the officers involved in these campaigns are LNPWA members, they were not acting as such. This confusion illustrates the lack of focus and direction of the organization and is one of the many challenges the LNPWA must overcome should it wish to rebuild.

Structure of the LNPWA

The LNPWA is governed by a national executive, consisting of a President, Vice president, General Secretary, Financial Secretary and three Advisors. The General Secretary is responsible for the LNPWA Chaplain, the Program Coordinator and the Visitations Coordinator. The Financial Secretary is responsible for the Treasurer. The Advisors to the Executive act as heads of the Ways and Means Committee, the Mobilization Committee, and the Social Committee. The LNPWA executive reports to a five-member Board of Directors that includes influential Liberians, such as peace activist and police officer Etweda “Sugars” Cooper. However, there is not much interaction between the board and the executive.

The LNPWA’s executive is elected, providing organizational oversight. Its operations are intended to be as transparent as possible. During the last election in 2008, interested female LNP officers submitted applications for positions of interest to a committee formed by the Liberian National Elections Commission and comprising retired members of various SSIs. The eligibility of each applicant was appraised and those approved were placed on the ballot. For those seeking the Presidency, a televised debate was organized, with the audience made up of current and retired personnel from all SSIs.

Executive positions, roles, responsibilities, membership, and decision-making processes are outlined in a constitution. Following the second civil war in Liberia, the LNPWA hired a consultant to transcribe the constitution as well as association bylaws, but this was never completed. Thus, no member has a copy of the constitution, although senior executives know, in general, what it contains.

Membership in the LNPWA is entirely voluntary, and it is estimated that there are approximately 500 members. A female police officer is eligible to join the association following her graduation from the Police Academy. Women must fill out an application form, provide a passport-sized photograph, and pay a membership fee of LRD 25 (approximately US\$0.35). Dues of LRD 50 (US\$0.69) are paid monthly by individual officers. Some of the LNPWA’s executive members are also members of the International Association of Women Police although the LNPWA is not an institutional member. Other regional police associations, such as the West African Police Women’s Association, are not well known. There are no male members in the LNPWA, but men can attend LNPWA events.

The LNPWA holds two monthly meetings: an executive meeting, where the agenda is determined and organizational matters are discussed, and one for the general membership. With permission from LNP administration, the meetings are conducted during daytime working hours to make it easier for women to attend. Communication regarding meetings and activities is by word-of-mouth, through police radio, citations and bulletins, and by text messages and telephone calls. Meetings are reserved for planning LNPWA activities and upcoming events. Some members of the executive sit on the Change Management Committee that oversees implementation of police reform policies, but information on how changes are affecting female police officers on the ground is not solicited from female police officers in their capacity as association members. Information regarding policing policies and practices is discussed in other venues.³¹

According to members, the LNPWA is a national association however there is little information about chapters outside Monrovia, and the central chapter does not interact with chapters outside the capital region. Female officers who are members remain members when they are transferred out of Monrovia. Focus group participants referred to other chapters outside of Monrovia and to a workshop for LNPWA members outside the capital, but could not cite any other activity elsewhere.³²

There are many other female staff associations within the security sector; the newest is the female staff association at the Ministry of National Security. There are no general staff associations or male-only staff associations in individual SSIs, although there is an umbrella association, Liberia National Law Enforcement Association (LINLEA), with a women's wing, Liberia Female Law Enforcement Association (LIFLEA).³³

The LNPWA Today: “The Challenge Is Ourselves”

The LNPWA's structure, mandate, roles, and activities are, in principle, in line with the gender and SSR legal and policy frameworks as well as the LNP and Liberian gender policies. Its internal structure is fairly democratic and has seemingly worked to promote female officers within the police service. Nevertheless, in its current state, the LNPWA is dysfunctional in a number of ways.

First, the lack of willingness to share responsibilities fairly is a key challenge facing members. The onus is placed on the president alone to organize meetings and events. This task is not shared among executive members, indicating a lack of trust among those leading the association. Female officer apathy was cited as one of the reasons for association inactivity, and this may be related to the fact that with greater roles come greater responsibilities. Women in more senior positions have less time to devote to running a separate organization in addition to their jobs and home life.

Second, low morale and a crisis in association leadership are other problems. In 2008, the former President of the LNPWA and Deputy Inspector General of Administration of the LNP were removed from service by the President of Liberia under allegations of corruption; since then, the new LNPWA executive has not been able to garner much support for the organization, nor has the executive shown commitment to the association. Members have stopped attending meetings because the executive is seen as weak and inefficient, doing little to encourage participation.³⁴ As membership in the LNPWA is voluntary and the association is not active, members believe that young female officers do not see the value in sacrificing time and effort on its account. As a result, it is thought that the last three Police Academy classes have graduated with little or no knowledge of the LNPWA's existence. Members felt

³¹ Changes to police policies and practices are shared through bulletins, at the police academy, workshops conducted by the LNP administration, and other external actors. Police radio will occasionally mention changes in practice.

³² Focus groups were held only in Monrovia; therefore, researchers could not gauge the full extent of activity of the LNPWA outside the capital.

³³ Other female security associations include: MNASWA, BINWA, LNFSWA and NBIWA.

³⁴ Focus group participants stated that the former president would go door to door to remind women to come to the meetings and, whether there were two or 200 members present, meetings would take place. Now, if there are low numbers, meetings are simply cancelled.

that when the previous President, who was also the Deputy Inspector General and a person influential within police management, organized a meeting, police officers would not refuse to attend lest they fall out of favour with such a senior figure. Because the current executive does not carry the same title, female officers may see the organization as less influential.

Disunity is a third problem facing the LNPWA. There is mistrust among female officers, and women do not watch out for or mentor one another professionally as they improve their rank within the LNP. Instead, they see each other as competition. Of more concern is the fact that women do not see demotions or dismissal of their colleagues as acts that reflect poorly on all female officers.

While female police officers in the LNP are well-versed in gender rights, demonstrating that on the surface gender training was taken seriously by the institution, female officers may be missing the more nuanced understanding of gender and women's rights. There are concerns that women feel they have made it, and new cohorts of police officers will not feel the drive to push against a discriminatory system, running the risk that the gains made by their predecessors will be lost. The association and, to a greater extent, general officer cohesion has fragmented into cliques loyal to various female police officers causing disunity and contributing to the stalled performance of the association.

In addition to the LNPWA's internal issues, much remains to be done in changing police culture regarding gender parity. Women are still viewed as sex objects by men, contributing to endemic sexual harassment and assault in Liberian workplaces. Male colleagues expect sexual favours in return for promotion, while some female colleagues also see their sexuality as a means to advancement and promotion, thus perpetuating this stereotype.³⁵ Stereotypes delegitimize female police officers, resulting in younger officers feeling less confident and, therefore, less assertive than their male colleagues, hampering their opportunities for promotion.³⁶ With the advancement of women in the LNP, it is believed that younger officers forget the struggle of previous generations to achieve their current position.

Opportunities for professional development are few and promotions are not necessarily based on competency in policing. Lowering the standards of recruitment for women placed new female police officers at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their male peers in terms of training, education, and experience, thus creating a perception that they were less competent. When female police officers do have external education opportunities, such as a university degree, their experience is not necessarily valued. The time off for university is construed as time away from policing and, therefore, translating into less experience as a police officer. Moreover, the most senior positions within the LNP are government appointed. There must be political will in the most senior ranks of government for there to be women in the highest police ranks. Currently, both Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the government of Liberia have a good track record in terms of appointing women to senior posts, including an Inspector General in the LNP and the Minister of Justice. It remains to be seen if this trend will continue.

LIFLEA should also speak on behalf of female officers, pushing SSIs to be more gender equal and to oversee implementation of reforms that address gender inequality. Yet, LIFLEA has also fallen inactive, and, as such, women cannot use LINLEA for such purposes.³⁷ Moreover the body is simply the women's wing of the general umbrella group. LIFLEA is not independent from the LINLEA executive, and women are not mainstreamed into the organization. All LIFLEA activities and funding must be approved by the general LINLEA secretariat. Dues paid by LIFLEA members are also controlled by LINLEA (DCAF and

³⁵ (Zaizay 2011)

³⁶ CSO members noted that one of the reasons they believe female officers to be more corrupt than their male colleagues is because they feel a need to "prove themselves" on the job. In other words, they need to be tougher than their male colleagues in the eyes of the public to gain legitimacy and to give them confidence in their work. To do this, they demand more in bribes. However, this delegitimizes their position further.

³⁷ LIFLEA conducted a strategic planning session in 2009 with WIPSEN-A and DCAF; they were experiencing problems similar to those of the LNPWA (DCAF and WIPSEN-A 2009; Zaizay 2011)

WIPSEN-A 2009). Except for the LIFLEA representative, LINLEA's secretariat is made up entirely of men; all female police, along with their concerns, are relegated to LIFLEA. Because of this isolation of gender-related issues, it was proposed that LIFLEA become an independent organization, leaving LINLEA as an exclusively male association. However, this concerns women's rights organizations that see the potential for a male organization to divert funding and focus away from the female association. Instead, they suggest that better gender mainstreaming within the current structure would lessen the potential for isolation of the female association and would create a more gender-sensitive association with LIFLEA acting as a wing that monitors minority interests.³⁸

Looking to the Future

Association members as well as others in SSIs recognize the importance of the LNPWA and would like to see it rejuvenated. Indeed the association offers the prospect of an internal yet informal body that can provide oversight of the reform process and improve working conditions and opportunities for female officers as well as their male peers.

Strategies to revive the LNPWA include an annual general meeting where a plan of action would be created. There are also requests for a constitutional review, looking specifically at the question of membership. There is consensus that compulsory membership for all female police officers would help the association by raising awareness of the LNPWA, expanding its membership base, and increasing its income from dues, which would finance more activities.

Awareness of the association among new recruits to the police service is low, and any new efforts to reform the LNPWA must have an aggressive outreach program as a key component. This could be done through radio and media advertisement, as well as visits to depots throughout the country. Unless membership is made mandatory, an aggressive membership drive is absolutely crucial to increase the association's base and to reinvigorate its members. Workshops for new members on the function of and opportunities in the LNPWA could also encourage younger members to become active within the association. Moreover, the workshops could introduce young female officers to LNP policies and practices that affect their well-being and protect their rights.

Equally as important as awareness campaigns and membership drives, the LNP administration and government ministries must become more engaged in LNPWA activities. A solid relationship must be maintained so that participation of officer members is also supported and permitted. Other partnerships with external organizations could improve LNPWA operations and exposure. The association is a member of WONGOSOL for example, an umbrella organization of women-focused CSOs and NGOs, yet it has not made use of connections within this body to improve services to its members. Greater interaction with civil society groups could allow for subsidized organizational development and education on topics, such as women's rights, and also provide civil society with insight regarding the experience of women in the security sector.

Furthermore, partnerships could improve lobbying efforts. Raising awareness of the public about LNPWA through radio programs, such as UN Radio, beauty pageants, and public fundraisers, could strengthen its reputation as well as that of female police officers.³⁹ Greater interaction with the Community Police Forums, a liaison board that has both community members and representatives from the police, through a designated focal point within the LNPWA could create more exposure for the LNPWA within the community. Active participation in civil society is not beyond reach for SSI associations: LINLEA is a member of the CSO-driven Security Sector Reform Working Group, a body of

³⁸ (Dorko 2011)

³⁹ LNPWA members suggested car washes and shoe shines as potential fundraising events, during a discussion on the financing of future activities. They did not initially turn to soliciting funds from donors and granting institutions or corporate partnerships.

CSOs, NGOs, government ministries and international organizations that monitors proposed security sector reforms. Yet more could be done to reap the benefits of such membership.

Expanding relationships beyond national actors is also a future goal of the organization. Establishing institutional links with the IAWP would expose the association to new ideas and connect Liberian female police officers with their peers globally. Links with international NGOs, United Nations agencies, and other donors could also expand programming for female police, as well as other officers, and improve the LNPWA as an internal oversight mechanism.

Taking a new approach to the way in which meetings are conducted to increase participation is being considered. Attendance at social functions held by the association is high. Combining meetings and social events could improve attendance at the former and encourage members to be more active within the organization. To initially rebuild unity and trust, a retreat similar to those held by the previous executive could be organized.

In order to fulfil its role as the advocacy organisation its members envisage, LNPWA must move away from being primarily a social organization to providing useful training for women, such as driving courses, so that more women are eligible for peacekeeping missions. Association-sponsored scholarships for female police officers to Liberian universities would also address the educational gap between male and female police officers and create a larger pool of eligible candidates for senior posts.

LNPWA also has great potential to support young police officers, such as through a mentorship program. Mentorship would encourage young police officers to become involved in the leadership of the association. Assistance from the Ministry of Gender and Development to encourage opportunities for mentorship of female professionals as part of Liberia's Gender Policy could be sought. This would involve a shift in organizational culture toward power sharing and delegation and could involve a new round of elections.⁴⁰ This recommendation extends to LIFLEA, whose current head is "President for Life." Other female officers may not be motivated to participate in the association if there are limited opportunities to play a meaningful role. Moreover, this structure runs counter to democratic principles.

Reassertion of the association must be coupled with sensitization efforts to dispel negative stereotypes of female officers. The SSR process was developed and implemented by outsiders, and gender sensitivity is seen as foreign, with the myth remaining that simply including female police officers will help gender sensitize the service. Although the presence of women in the LNP has and will continue to increase diversity within the ranks, men and women who are not gender aware cannot be expected to make an organization more gender equal. Organizations such as the LNPWA and LIFLEA must first address how to internalize these concepts so that they are owned by the LNP before any change can actually occur.⁴¹

Conclusions

The LNPWA, as well as its umbrella organization LIFLEA, are at a crossroads. Both have fallen into inactivity leaving female police officers without independent labour representation. This case study is both timely and pertinent, as it has revealed the importance of these associations to female officers and opportunities to revive the LNPWA. Although focus group discussions quickly changed into workshops, the underlying issues uncovered reveal key challenges that female officers face in asserting themselves within a male-dominated profession. The insecurity that women face and barriers to maintaining a powerful association are only symptoms of larger issues, such as dysfunctional promotion schemes, corruption, and limited accountability for police actions in the service.

⁴⁰ Because members of the executive were present at some of the focus group discussions, it is difficult to gauge true support for this suggestion.

⁴¹ Interview with Thomas Jaye, former Head of Office, Liberia for the International Center for Transitional Justice, 9 Aug. 2011.

The workshops and subsequent interviews also revealed the enormous potential of both the LNPWA and LIFLEA to instigate change internally and encourage and support women. More encouraging is the significant reputation that the LNPWA still maintains among female police officers and other SSIs, which provides an opening for its resurrection.

The SSR process seeks to professionalize SSIs, providing more democratic and human rights sensitive services, and both the LNP and Liberia's Gender Policies seek the advancement of women. This is in line with the LNPWA's mandate and expressed roles. Should the association rebound from its current state, it could play an important role, not only as an oversight body, but also by contributing to the SSR process. Small efforts, such as opportunities for mentorship, would help implement recommendations from the Ministry of Gender and Development's government Gender Policy. Although the LNPWA should not be responsible for the gender mainstreaming of a government service, the association does provide the LNP with a resource during the reform process and beyond.

The association will remain relevant as long as female officers continue to face hurdles within the police service and are perceived as less competent than their male counterparts externally. The LNPWA is in a good position to address these criticisms by organizing professional development courses for colleagues. Moreover, NGOs, CSOs, and other stakeholders are interested in increasing interactions with the LNPWA and in providing support and funding for some of these activities. Furthermore, greater cooperation between these organizations and female staff associations in the security sector could help build trust and give civil society a better understanding of the situation women in these institutions face. There is a paucity of information regarding the types of positions women occupy in security institutions, and whether they occupy a variety of decision-making positions. Because of mistrust, much of this information is regarded as classified; dialogue and the use of internal allies could overcome that mistrust and create a better understanding of how the information can be used.

LNPWA and LIFLEA face similar challenges. Their original founders are no longer in charge, and subsequent executive committees seem unable to maintain the needed momentum. This leads to the question of whether the organization itself is attractive to members or whether progress has been the work of a handful of powerful actors. Are members active within the LNPWA because it can lead to individual advancement within the police service? Or are they motivated by the belief that the LNPWA can indeed result in advancement for all female members of the police service? Although not mutually exclusive, based on the information provided, it appears the former is true.

To counter this, mentorship, as well as opening up opportunities for junior officers to play meaningful roles could increase the LNPWA's relevance. More female police officers in senior positions could help their lower ranking colleagues advance their careers. Power no longer rests in a select few women, yet the importance of leadership feeds into the relevance of the organization.

Though members perceive the association as an advocacy body, overall, LNPWA's capacity to advocate for women's rights and officers' general welfare was weak. A mentorship program would help build the type of skills required to boost this capacity. Gathering information on what would make the association more responsive to members and restructuring so that members derive the maximum benefit are additional strategies that could help increase its relevance.

It is reassuring that LNPWA members are gender aware and they understand the underlying discrimination that still exists against women. Where the association falls short is in its capacity for organizational management as well as motivation and leadership. As mentioned in the previous section, the former can be addressed through partnerships with non-profit organizations to conduct capacity-building work. This is not a "quick fix," but requires commitment by the LNPWA and its partners to in-depth training, support, and follow-up. Future strategic planning and training, therefore, should be

considered, potentially through a longer term project that includes several foci, such as organizational and strategic management, leadership skills, budgeting, and fundraising.

There have been attempts to improve the management and planning of female staff associations in Liberia but these have not resulted in increased activity. For example, LIFLEA held strategic planning workshops, with assistance from international and regional organizations (DCAF and WIPSEN-A 2009), which helped outline goals, but there was little follow-through. This has been attributed to limited ownership of the process, but could also be the drive of LIFLEA's executive.⁴²

In Liberia, the focus of NGOs seems to be moving away from monitoring the SSR program. Yet ongoing SSR oversight is still required; LNPWA as well as LIFLEA can follow progress and monitor whether changes that improve conditions for female staff are maintained. One way to achieve this is to work closely with the LNP's Gender Affairs Section, which is grossly understaffed, under-equipped and will not be able to fulfill its mandate adequately without urgent assistance.⁴³ Associations could assist by disseminating information on behalf of the Gender Affairs Section, conducting referrals and training, as well as providing feedback.

To contribute to this process and provide greater support to female police officers and other women in the security sector, it is important that LIFLEA be reactivated and its activities expanded beyond Monrovia. LIFLEA can play an important role in lobbying on behalf of individual associations on crucial and sensitive topics. It can also serve as an invaluable organization to help build the confidence of female officers, for example, by building networks among women in other SSIs. Female officers would feel more comfortable taking posts in rural locations if they were connected to women working in firefighting, prisons, national security, and border services in other areas. Networking would also increase information sharing among institutions so that gender-sensitive reforms do not slip through the cracks in some institutions. Furthermore, women's leadership should expand into LINLEA as well, with women taking an active role and running for executive positions. Such moves, although small, will improve gender mainstreaming. To create a functioning SSI association, however, the LNPWA will need to mend ties with LIFLEA, putting aside differences in favour of a common goal.

The previous support, as well as the pride, that LNPWA and, to some extent, LIFLEA provided to female officers in the LNP continues today. Researchers cannot overlook the prior roles and activities of these associations in supporting and inspiring female police officers and women in the security sector. Nor can researchers ignore the current enthusiasm and willingness to start again. Unity is the standard response from LNPWA members when asked about the primary role of the association. The LNPWA should go back to basics, focusing on its most important role: creating a united and inclusive body for all female police officers. This is the first step in building a relevant and effective organization.

⁴² Interview with Marpue Speare, Executive Director, WONGSOL, and other senior female police officers, 11 Aug. 2011

⁴³ According to Valasek & Griffiths, (citing A. Itoka chief of gender affairs section), the office has seven staff members.

Finding Stability and Growth in the Sierra Leone Police Female Staff Association

In Sierra Leone, although SSR started in 1997, police reform began only in 1999. The police reform process was supported by the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and the British Government following the Lomé Peace Accords.⁴⁴ The goal was to transform the police force, which was not only marred by war but also by the police service's bad reputation before the conflict (Meek 2003). The current reform process, primarily supported by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) with assistance from other donors and implementing bodies, is seeking to professionalize the police service, making it more effective, democratic, and transparent.

The perception of the SSR process is that it is not contextualised enough and possibly even too “modern,” in that the training and equipment provided does not meet the realities on the ground. Sierra Leone is one of the poorest, least-developed nations in the world, yet police reform has focused on modern equipment and technology rather than a return to basic policing.⁴⁵ Another critique is that the process was not applied to all elements of the security sector and the judiciary. Rather, in an elitist fashion, most emphasis was placed on the military followed by the police. Training consisted of equipping senior officers with new skills rather than changing the culture from a force to an essential public service.⁴⁶ Reform is also an uphill battle, as the service is extremely underfunded and unsupported by the national government. Almost all costs, including equipment, training, salaries, and uniforms, are covered by donor support.⁴⁷

Although CSOs initially played a role in implementing Sierra Leone's SSR program, only a few have remained involved in the process, most notably the Campaign for Good Governance and Conciliation Resources. Indeed, SSR appears to be a low priority for NGOs and CSOs in the country, and there are limited bodies and forums to allow CSOs and NGOs to interact with policymakers and senior management within SSIs, making the reform process difficult to monitor.

Oversight of the police should be the responsibility of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Local Government and Rural Development, but their involvement is limited. There is also a Police Council, but it is largely ceremonial. As a result, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) holds considerable influence over the way in which the service is run, with only limited oversight by a civilian watchdog to ensure reforms are taking place (Horn et al. 2011).⁴⁸ On the positive side, limited government oversight means little interference and space for the IGP to overhaul the service, pushing through controversial reforms as required in the SSR program.

There have been positive aspects of the reform process. Examples include the creation of the Family Support Units, which provide better service in terms of prevention of and response to SGBV, Child Protection Services, and the Local Police Partnership Board (LPPB) made up of community members who liaise with police on a regular basis. The police have also become more accountable to the public (and to its membership) with the establishment of the Complaint, Discipline and Internal Investigation Department (CDIID).

⁴⁴ UNAMSIL was the UN mission to Sierra Leone from 1999-2005. It was replaced by the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) from 2005-2008. In 2008, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) replaced UNIOSIL. For more information on the SSR process in Sierra Leone, please see Albrecht and Jackson (2008).

⁴⁵ There is concern that police are being trained in skills that do not match what is needed on the ground. The representative of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone that we spoke with stated, “They are using 21st century policing techniques for 19th century policing needs” (Interview with Janice McLean, Chief Police Section, UNIPSIL, 19 Aug. 2011).

⁴⁶ Interview with Marsella MacCauley, Head of Programmes, Campaign for Good Governance on 19 August 2011

⁴⁷ Interview with Sonia Warner, Governance Advisor, DFID on 19 August 2011

⁴⁸ Additional information from interview with Sonia Warner (2011).

Part of the SSR process has been increasing the number of women within the service as well as promoting more women into decision-making roles. However, 10 years of war saw SGBV used as a weapon by all sides, including the security sector. It is believed that this legacy is making it difficult to encourage women to join the security sector (Meek 2003). Female police are increasing in numbers — they make up about 16 per cent of the service (Gaanderse and Valasek 2010) — and are increasingly found in senior positions and Sierra Leone’s contribution to peacekeeping contingents. Yet internally, they still face discrimination, harassment and a steep learning curve.

The Sierra Leone Police Female Staff Association has the potential to address these issues from within the security sector. Because its membership consists of the entire female police population, it is well placed to be a driving force for change within the Sierra Leone Police. Women in the Security Sector – Sierra Leone (WISS-SL) – a better-known umbrella female staff association for the security sector, is another key actor. It is open to all serving female employees of SSIs, including female police officers.

The Sierra Leone case study will examine whether associations here are contributing to change within the police. This case study begins by describing the history and general situation of female police officers within the SLP. Background information on the SLPFSA is followed by a description of its role, activities and perceptions of the association. The case study then highlights the SLPFSA’s achievements and challenges, providing insight into what its members and stakeholders would like it to become. The case study concludes with an analysis of whether the SLPFSA is contributing to SSR or gender equity within the SLP and recommendations for further action.

Women in Police

Although women were present in the police service before the war, focus group participants described the service as extremely traditional, where women continue to be marginalized.⁴⁹ Since the end of the war in 2002 and the start of the SSR process, there has been a push to appear more gender sensitive and to recruit more women into the police service through outreach campaigns in schools, religious groups, CSOs, and the LPPBs.

In 2008, the SLP released a Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Policy (SLP 2008). The policy seeks to counter the discrimination women face in Sierra Leone society as well as in the police service by improving recruitment, training opportunities, deployments and transfers, promotions, women’s health care, and women’s representation in decision-making roles.⁵⁰ The SLP outlined specific training to increase female officers’ capacity, such as computer training and driving lessons (UNIFEM 2007, SLP 2008). Moreover, an accelerated promotion scheme has been established to recruit female university graduates into decision-making roles. Through affirmative action, women are now present in top positions as Assistant Inspectors General, Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, and Inspectors. Nevertheless, women only make up 7 per cent of the ranks of Superintendent and above (O’Neill 2007) and, despite increased recruitment, female officers are sparse outside major urban centres.

The scarcity of women in the SLP is partly due to the limited amount of eligible female candidates for the position of police officer. The service has difficulty attracting educated women as most women are not as educated as men, making up only 36 per cent of secondary school students (World Bank 2007).

⁴⁹ This is according to the focus group study participants.

⁵⁰ The policy lays out how gender will be mainstreamed through the SLP and seeks to balance the genders on decision-making bodies, such as the Executive Management Board, promotions boards, and recruitment panel. It looks to ensure that training opportunities, deployments, and promotions are equally given to both men and women and that specific capacity-building endeavours in areas such as driving and computer literacy, as well as scholarships, are provided as a form of affirmative action for women. Finally, the policy takes into account women’s health by ensuring that gynecologic procedures are paid for and that a woman’s role as a mother should be taken into account when deciding on transfers of female officers.

Furthermore, those who are better educated perceive the security sector as a “man’s profession” and do not consider a career in law enforcement.⁵¹

Of the SSIs in Sierra Leone, the SLP has made the most improvements in terms of gender mainstreaming, but, as a body, it is still not gender aware. For example, female police officers have the designation “Woman” in front of their rank (e.g., Woman Inspector) while their male colleagues have only the rank. This impedes gender neutrality within the service and allows for biases, although possibly in favour of female officers in the case of affirmative action efforts. Moreover, women primarily remain in certain roles and divisions, such as traffic and administration, with few in areas such as the Operational Support Department.⁵² Despite subtle improvements, the SLP still has a long road ahead if it wishes to truly achieve gender parity.

The Women’s Police Forum

The Sierra Leone Police Female Staff Association was first established in Freetown in 2005 and was referred to as “The Forum,” with 13 senior police women as members. The SLPFSA, as it is now known, came into existence in 2007 and expanded throughout the country to include all female police staff.

The SLPFSA was created to support the advancement of women within a male-dominated service. The idea of establishing an association arose when several senior SLP officers attended international training in Ghana, where they came into contact with other female police officers who had formed associations in their various countries to push for the rights of female personnel within the police service. On her return to Freetown, the current President of the association presented the concept to the Executive Management Board, while pressure was also applied by the SLP’s most senior police women. This dual effort led to the creation of the SLPFSA.

All female police officers automatically become members of the SLPFSA on graduation from Police College. Civilian staff members (e.g., cleaners) in the SLP are not permitted to join; however, male officers are welcome. Although there are no official male members, men attend meetings as representatives of their divisions and some are active participants in the SLPFSA. At the national level, there is no formal membership registration process and no ledger is kept of official members. However, the record of monthly dues paid provides, in essence, an approximation of the number of active members. The SLPFSA is financed by voluntary dues paid at each meeting. Each SLPFSA body is responsible for collecting its own dues. Dues are SLL 2,000–5,000 (US\$0.45–1.10). The national body does not have a bank account, but regional bodies and small offices do.⁵³ The SLPFSA is present in all regions of the country, but appears to be most active in Freetown, with some activity in Bo and Kenema.⁵⁴

The SLPFSA is governed by a general constitution, which applies to the entire national body; however, regional chapters have developed their own constitutions, in addition. The constitution outlines positions and roles of the executive and secretariat. At the national level, the SLPFSA has a Chairlady, Vice Chairlady, Secretary, Financial Secretary, Treasurer and Public Relations Officer.⁵⁵ These positions vary by chapter; for example, in the Southern region, the Bo SLPFSA has a President, Vice-President, several Secretaries, Treasurer, Auditor, and Advisors. All positions are elected, and elections occur every 2 years. In addition to the secretariat, a Planning Committee is responsible for identifying and planning activities and events, except for training which is organized by the secretariat. The planning committee is made up

⁵¹ As of 2006, the total number of enrolled secondary school students in Sierra Leone was estimated at 45,000 students. Out of this number, 36% were female. (The World Bank 2007)

⁵² Women in the SLP make up 16% of officers however they are only 8% of the Operational Support Department.

⁵³ The Southern Regional Chapter, for example, has a bank account. The national chapter is located within SLP headquarters and requires permission from the SLP Executive Management Board to open a bank account or to directly debit SLPFSA dues.

⁵⁴ Kenema in the Eastern Region and Bo in the Southern Region.

⁵⁵ The terms “Chairlady” and “Vice-Chairlady” – rather than “Chairperson” – are titles used by the SLPFSA Executive.

of two elected representatives from each division. Decisions are made by consensus; when consensus cannot be reached, the decision is made by a simple majority vote. Most members do not have a copy of the constitution.

Meetings are held once a month and information about them is relayed through division commanders via memo and radio. Members of the secretariat communicate via cell phone, but no database of members exists, and communication by text messaging or telephone does not occur. Emergency meetings are also held on an as-needed basis, such as on the death of a member. Minutes are recorded and division representatives are required to disseminate decisions and key points to their division members. Male police officers attend the meetings if they are the selected division representative. This is seen as important to educate men on concerns facing female police officers and to gain allies. The SLPFSA uses creative incentives to encourage participation, such as combining the meeting with a social activity that involves food and drink and having divisions compete to host a meeting. All members of the winning division are welcomed to the social portion of the meeting, encouraging support for the organization.

At meetings, women share information about changes in SLP policies and practices to some extent. The primary methods for communicating such information are internal memos and muster parades, i.e., the daily morning briefing received by each division. On occasion, topics such as the SLP sexual harassment policy and even UNSCR 1325, and the Sierra Leone National Action Plan for its implementation, are discussed. However, the primary concerns raised are usually officer discipline and not adhering to the dress code.

Other SSIs also have women's associations, but the police association is seen as the most advanced and organized group. In addition to individual associations, an umbrella organization for SSI female staff associations exists: the Women in the Security Sector – Sierra Leone. The SLPFSA is an institutional member of this body, but members outside SLP headquarters see it as irrelevant because they perceive it as military dominated.⁵⁶ In addition, some senior officers are aware of and are members of international police associations, such as the West African Police Women Association and IAWP, yet most police women, especially those outside the capital, are neither members of these organizations nor are they aware of their existence. This leaves the SLPFSA as their primary association and support network.

Activities and Roles

The SLPFSA functions primarily as a social group and a channel for spreading information about policing as well as current events. It also holds a number of events, such as parties and trips, for members. It provides welfare payments in the case of the death of an officer or family member, a wedding, or a birth. Activities are not generally conducted on a national scale; however, there is discussion between associations in the Eastern and Southern regions about cohosting events and activities. Although partnerships with the wider civil society do not exist, both national and regional association members are in touch with other female security sector staff associations and they attend and support each other's events.⁵⁷

No strategic planning is carried out because of limited financial resources. Activities are primarily conducted on an as-needed basis as is additional fundraising for these events. Activities are usually developed by the planning committees, but any member is free to bring forward an idea to the group. The SLPFSA does not host training sessions, but Secretariat members will lobby for training for members, for

⁵⁶ WISS-SL was initially led by a senior female military official, Brigadier Kestoria Kabia; however, leadership was passed on to a more junior female police officer as senior personnel felt younger women should be more involved in the organization. Senior personnel maintain an advisory role, with Brigadier Kabia encouraging the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) Serving Sisters to be involved in WISS-SL to a greater extent than other SSIs.

⁵⁷ This coordination is not done through WISS-SL.

example when an opportunity to attend an international training course arises in areas where the association feels female officers require additional professional development.

Limited lobbying and advocacy are conducted by SLPFSA members on such issues as job promotion and deployment for female officers. Association members have been known to intervene in personal matters if they are affecting the performance of a fellow female police officer, such as in the case of a jealous husband or partner preventing an officer from performing night duty. They support women who are survivors of domestic violence and counsel women on domestic violence issues informally.

The extent to which sexual exploitation and assault occur is downplayed within the SLP. Discussion and meetings with external stakeholders revealed that the practice is pervasive and occurs at every level of management. Conversely, police women complain that younger female police officers become intimately involved with senior male officers to the detriment of their career and reputation. The topic remains taboo and, despite positive developments such as the CDIID and a sexual harassment policy, no officer has reported sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or assault. The fear remains that if an officer talks about these things, she will be transferred, and the more senior the perpetrator the more vulnerable to exploitation and the consequences of reporting she becomes.⁵⁸

The SLPFSA does not produce material such as information pamphlets on the organization or on policing policies that primarily concern or would be of interest to women, for its members. It has no role in the promotion of policing as a viable career option for women. This is the responsibility of the Human Resources and Community Service Departments; however, some women make an effort to go to schools and speak with young people about a career in policing.

Although the role of the SLPFSA is limited in terms of its activities and prominence, it is seen as important to its members, particularly in building unity and camaraderie among female police officers. It is seen as a source of support and empowerment, with members noting that they feel encouraged to perform better as officers knowing they have the SLPFSA behind them. Members brought up an advocacy component, stating the association would stand up for colleagues in the face of discrimination or sexual harassment. Finally, female police officers outside Freetown feel that the SLPFSA plays an important role in connecting them with their colleagues in the capital.

Achievements

For women in the SLPFSA, the existence of the body is in itself a major achievement. Despite the outwardly gender-focused administration, gender equality, as part of greater officer welfare, is seen by many to be a non-priority of the SLP.⁵⁹ There is scant mention of gender equality initiatives within the SLP strategic plan for 2009–2011 and, unlike operational or material targets, internal oversight mechanisms and officer welfare targets are not provided.⁶⁰ The SLPFSA is seen as a driving force in the push for a 30 per cent quota for women in the security services. In addition, it is seen as an important

⁵⁸ Interview with Naasu Fofana, Gender Adviser, Office of the ERSG, UNIPSIL on 19 August 2011; Interview with Janice McLean (2011)

⁵⁹ At the same time, the SLP has undertaken a number of notable initiatives, including a gender self-assessment and a gender action plan based on the survey findings. The action plan includes such things as: the establishment of a gender directorate; gender training for SLP general duty personnel; capacity building for female personnel and gender review of select SLP policies. Unlike this study's focus group and interview participants, NGOs and members outside the capital see the executive of the SLP as very gender positive.

⁶⁰ Two examples of this appear in the Outlined Strategic Goals and Objectives for the SLP for 2009–2011: "4.3 Decision making systems, procedures and processes; Strategic Goal 3: System, procedures and processes improved; Objective 3.1 Established mechanisms to ensure policies, procedures and systems are adhered to. Key Interventions a) Undertake gap analysis of policies, systems, procedures and processes, b) Mainstream policies, systems and procedures within the rank and file of SLP, c) Establish and decentralise the inspectorate unit to ensure compliance in the SLP; Target: Reduce decisions taking outside policies by x percent" and "4.5 Conditions of Service; Strategic Goal 5: Socio-economic condition of personnel improved; Objective 2.2 Personnel welfare improved; Key Interventions: Advocate for improved conditions of service; review personnel welfare especially in the area of health and shelter; Establish partnerships with donors, parastatals like NASSIT [National Social Security and Insurance Trust] & private sector to support welfare needs; Target: Conducive accommodation facilities increased by y%." (Office of the Inspector General of Police 2008.

body for maintaining female presence on the Executive Management Board. Currently, there is one member with a decision-making role — the only female Assistant Inspector General — and two female observers of senior rank.⁶¹ Finally, there is a feeling that the SLPFSA has assisted in pushing for more women to go on peacekeeping missions on behalf of the SLP.

Although the SLPFSA has been attributed with creating a greater sense of unity among female police officers, there is confusion about the achievements of individual women versus achievements of the association. Indeed, the promotion and lobbying effort of individual female police officers raises the profile of all female police officers and improves gender equality within the service. It is difficult to ascertain whether any specific advancement was a result of the collective work of the SLPFSA or lobbying by strong senior officers.

Challenges

The SLPFSA faces numerous challenges to its ability to function as a viable national female police association. Many of the challenges stem from its dependence on the SLP for support and legitimacy. Without enough autonomy from the SLP executive management, the SLPFSA faces limits in terms of funding, communication, leadership, community partnership, and perception of the organization.

Funding to conduct activities and events remains the largest hurdle for the association. The SLPFSA is currently dependent on members' dues, with supplementation from the Executive Management Board for larger events such as national conventions. The SLPFSA requested that its membership dues be debited at source from police women's paycheques, but this was denied despite members' agreement. The reason given was that police salaries are already too low and deducting from source would lead to undue hardship. Thus, voluntary dues are collected from participating members at meetings. Requests for funding from the Executive Management Board are also routinely dismissed due to limited fund availability in the budget. Compounding this is the reliance the SLPFSA has on the SLP for letterhead and permission to interact with CSOs and other stakeholders that could be a source of funding or in-kind partnership contributions. New relationships and requests for grants must first go through the Executive Management Board, discouraging the SLPFSA from actively forming partnerships with civil society or seeking funding from interested donors.

Meetings are difficult to organize outside headquarters and major urban centres, and the SLPFSA as a whole rarely meets. Permission to hold a national meeting must come from the Executive Management Board at headquarters, as leave must be granted to attending members. The last general meeting was held in 2009 in Bo, in the Southern Region. This leaves regional chapters feeling out of touch with the central body in Freetown. Bringing women from rural areas in for meetings is also a challenge. The SLP has very few vehicles for use outside policing, and public transportation is inefficient; therefore, it is rare for all members, particularly those from rural areas, to attend meetings. This presents a problem in terms of assistance and information sharing, as well as the relevance of the organization for women posted away from urban centres, and, in effect, threatens the legitimacy and solidarity of the SLPFSA. Simply from a financial standpoint, revenue collection is difficult as dues are collected at meetings. If women cannot travel to pay their dues and if they do not see the relevance of their attendance at meetings, the organization will not have enough money to provide programs or activities.

The Commonwealth, the United Nations, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), DFID, and the SLP itself provide regular training sessions in management and leadership, including a specific set

⁶¹ There are five assistant inspectors general; only one is female. Two senior women were previously on the Executive Management Board, but one has left for a peacekeeping mission and is close to retirement.

of courses for female police officers.⁶² Moreover, they provide technical training in such areas as weapons handling and cybercrime, in addition to sensitivity to and awareness of gender-based violence (SLP 2011). Despite the variety of courses, there is some question about whether all officers have comparable access to training.⁶³ Donors and external actors are also concerned that police officers are more interested in external training than internal, as they receive a per diem and meals with the former. The salary of junior officers does not cover the basic standard of living.⁶⁴ Those in more senior positions do not receive much more. Thus, participating in external training and events is a way to supplement one's salary. On the other hand women are often passed over for special promotions and training, which is frequently organized for male colleagues, specifically those who are in favour with executive management. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain whether members of the SLPFSA would like more training because they would like to supplement their income or because they really do not have access to the professional development they feel they need, or both.

At the operational level, leadership is vested in a small number of people. This is common not only in the SLPFSA, but also in the umbrella group, WISS-SL, as well as other female security staff associations, such as the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) Serving Sisters. There is a perception that delegating tasks reveals an inability to fully handle the position.⁶⁵ This places considerable responsibility on the leaders of national or regional-level organizations. Although the advantage is greater control, the disadvantages include lack of knowledge transfer within the organization and isolation of the leader, which creates the potential for camps to pit one leader against another.

How the SLPFSA is viewed is also an issue. Male police officers do not respect the association and believe that its meetings are just social gatherings, despite substantial issues addressed at each meeting.⁶⁶ While minutes are shared to help dispel this perception, more needs to be done to enhance the SLPFSA's image.⁶⁷ Outside the SLP, the SLPFSA is unknown. This is in contrast with the SLP Wives Association, which is extremely active in the community and a member of the Women's Forum (a separate organization using the original name of the SLPFSA), an umbrella group of women's CSOs working on peacebuilding issues in Sierra Leone. By networking with CSOs and participating in external activities, this association has managed to build a powerful reputation as a charitable organization, unlike the SLPFSA.

Compounding Issues

The SLPFSA is a way of bridging the gap between senior and junior members of the police service, as it provides a medium for younger women to interact with higher level decision-makers. However, the rigid hierarchy within the association leaves little room for mentorship or empowerment of younger women.

Many members lack confidence and leadership qualities. In Sierra Leone, women in general are not encouraged to seek professional opportunities.⁶⁸ Female police officers cite lack of training as a contributing factor, but training does not necessarily build confidence — it simply provides tools. Exposure, promotion, encouragement, and support are more likely to increase confidence. Younger women are wary of voicing their concerns in front of their seniors, as culture and tradition dictate that

⁶² In 2009–2010, 56 training courses were attended by 4,346 officers; 1,652 of them were women (38 per cent of all trainees). Six courses were specifically designed for women: four focused on female officer management and leadership skills and two focused on SGBV awareness in SLP barracks for SLP wives. All other courses were open to female officers.

⁶³ Training may be directed at specific divisions; as the Family Support Unit (representing only 3% of SLP staff) and the Operational Support Department receive more training than others.

⁶⁴ Based on comments from interviews with Kate Kwadzovi (2011) and Sonia Warner (2011); A monthly salary plus allowances for an entry level position barely covers the cost of a bag of rice. As of April 2011, a police constable's salary was Le148, 520 (approximately US\$ 33). A sack of rice costs Le140, 000 (approximately US\$30). (Horn et al., Gordon and Albrecht 2011).

⁶⁵ Marsella MaCauley (2011)

⁶⁶ Interview with Elizabeth Turay, Assistant Inspector General, SLP on 15 August 2011

⁶⁷ Interview with Memuna Conteh, President of the SLPFSA and Head of Community Relations, SLP on 15 August 2011

⁶⁸ Interview with Gloria Bayoh, Women and Children's Rights Department, Human Rights Commission – Sierra Leone, on 16 August 2011

young women do not have enough experience to make decisions or to have formed opinions. In all of the security institutions, younger servicewomen feel held back by more senior colleagues and discriminated against because of their youth.⁶⁹ During focus group discussions, for example, younger staff members either did not speak or were dismissed before the discussion took place. This reverence for seniority also means that younger women are not encouraged to think for themselves. They are often encouraged to seek advice from older relatives or women with whom they have close ties, and are not expected to question or go against advice received. Although senior members can provide positive mentorship, they can also reinforce traditional values thus dissuading women from decisions that could help their careers, such as accepting a promotion that requires a transfer away from their family.⁷⁰

Traditional values also include superstition. Belief in witchcraft influences some officers' decision-making, as they think that pushing against the status quo will cause a curse to be placed on them, resulting in misfortune, illness, or even death.⁷¹

The rigidity of the system has resulted in policewomen accepting the promotions process without questioning how it could be improved or whether it is in line with the SLP's gender policy.⁷² The Executive Management Board oversees the promotions process, so that decisions are not made by only one person and there is recourse should a police officer wish to challenge a decision. Yet outside stakeholders working directly with the police claim that promotions, particularly at the most senior levels, are nepotistic in nature. Senior positions go to those close to senior officials and, in many cases, this means they do not go to women.⁷³ It seems that police officers do not see the current promotions system as changing or improving with the advent of new oversight bodies such as the CDIID, causing women to overlook potential abuses in the process.

On a personal level, members do not have sound knowledge of national legislation or international agreements that assure their equality or much understanding of what SSR entails. They lack a feminist or even a gendered lens in their interpretation of policies within the SLP and standard practices (sanctioned or unsanctioned). Moreover, they do not question how traditional gender roles reinforce stereotypes of female police officers and can keep them from being promoted.⁷⁴ Female officers do not see how social constructs that require women to be primary caregivers for their families and view aspects of the job such as night duty or transfers as unwomanly lead to female officers being unable to perform their job properly and, therefore, make them ineligible for certain promotions.⁷⁵

Child care is not provided, nor are provisions made for women to bring their families with them if they are transferred. There are many single mothers in the SLP, and they fear that if they leave their children unsupervised they will drop out of school and, in the case of teenage daughters, will be sexually abused. Women also fear that, if they are transferred, their spouses will be unfaithful or leave them.⁷⁶ Requirements such as night shifts present safety as well as familial problems. Few SLP vehicles are operational; therefore, there is no transportation to ensure that officers return home safely at night.

⁶⁹ Interview with Naasu Fofana (2011)

⁷⁰ Interview with Naasu Fofana (2011)

⁷¹ This issue was raised in several interviews and focus group discussions.

⁷² The Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Policy requires that information and opportunities for promotions, transfers and deployments are provided equally to men and women and that there are equal numbers of men and women on recruitment and promotions boards and on the Executive Management Board.

⁷³ Interview with Janice McLean (2011)

⁷⁴ Female officers are referred to by their male peers as "suckling mothers."

⁷⁵ It is interesting that the SLP's Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Policy highlights the fact that women are the primary childcare providers and that societal barriers may keep them from carrying out their job properly. The policy calls for this to be taken into account in promotions and deployments.

⁷⁶ Interviewees stated that they feared other female police officers would "come after" their partners or husbands, rather than being concerned that their partner or husband would be unfaithful.

Moreover, shift work can prove difficult for mothers of young children when shifts do not coincide with school and mealtime.

Some female police officers have little sympathy for the women who face these constraints. The officers feel sacrifices need to be made to effectively do one's job and believe that women must operate at above and beyond what is expected of them to prove themselves. Female police officers see lack of discipline, poor regard for the dress code, and sexual relations with senior management as the main barriers to women's promotion, in addition to their inability or unwillingness to perform official duties because of familial needs (e.g. child care) or an uncooperative spouse. They do not see how constraints, such as family obligations, are based on traditional gender roles and, thus, primarily affect women and contribute to poor job performance and negative stereotypes. The extent to which criticism falls on police women themselves varies. It must be noted that the gender knowledge of female police officers varies: women in Freetown know far more about the SSR process and gender-focused legislation and agreements than those in other urban centres.⁷⁷ Yet, in all cases, few female police officers are actually aware, and even less have enough background or training to see the more nuanced forms of discrimination against women.

The responsibility of changing the SLP into a more equitable service should not fall on the shoulders of female police officers alone. There is onus on the part of the SLP executive as well. Because the IGP enjoys great autonomy in decision-making he has the ability to push through much-needed reforms for women. SLPFSA members believe that with lobbying from female police officers within the SLP executive, much more could be done to bring about change.

Looking to the Future

The SLPFSA would like to grow, both through an increase in the number of women in the SLP and in terms of active membership. It would like membership to be standardized and formalized in an electronic database, which would keep track of numbers and facilitate communications. The association would also like to create registration forms. Although this seems simple, basic supplies are extremely difficult to obtain in Sierra Leone. Most police stations do not have even the most basic forms for reporting crimes; most officers do not have paper or writing instruments needed to conduct their job let alone spare resources for outside activities (Horn et al. 2011). This is not unique to the police. In August 2011, Fourah Bay College in Freetown, one of the foremost universities in West Africa, ran out of paper and over 4000 students had their exams postponed (BBC News 2011). This problem could also affect other proposed services. The association would like to produce newsletters as well as information brochures on policies and practices that directly affect female police officers. To stabilize its financing, it would also like to be able to collect dues directly by debiting paycheques. Organizationally, the secretariat would like to review the constitution and hold new elections in Freetown.

On a professional level, SLPFSA members would like the organization to provide, or at least organize, training in both management and operational areas. Driving lessons and computer training are of most interest.⁷⁸ Support for education, such as scholarships for university degrees, would also be welcome, as women stated that they could not afford to take time off to complete course work, professionally or financially. Female police officers would like to see women's experience within the police service improve and more women in senior, decision-making roles. They also believe that more emphasis should be placed on knowledge and policing skills rather than brawn, when they are being considered for promotion. To achieve these goals, SLPFSA members realize that they require lobbying skills and they would like to see the staff association take on more of an advocacy role.

⁷⁷ This is based on general questions around gender and sex, in addition to knowledge of the SSR process in both locations.

⁷⁸ This is despite a noted lack of computers and vehicles. However, for career advancement — or, more importantly, eligibility for peacekeeping missions — these are important skills. Another interesting note is that one participant in the focus group discussion in Bo was trained as a police mechanic, but did not know how to drive.

The SLP interacts regularly with CSOs, NGOs, and international stakeholders. A relationship also exists between UNIPSIL and the SLP. The Gender Officer at the Office of the Executive Representative of the Secretary General often works directly with security institutions, most recently to develop a gender component for joint training between the police and military.⁷⁹ CSOs and NGOs work closely with the SLP to implement rights, protection, and SGBV prevention-based programming and these organizations have expressed an interest in partnership.⁸⁰

Yet despite this, there is no interaction between the SLPFSA and civil society. In fact, members of the SLPFSA do not see how they could work with or interact with the actors outside SSIs. They believe they would require permission from the Executive Management Board to partner with other organizations. Should the SLPFSA be approached by another organization, it is believed that such a proposal would be easier to consider, but it would have to go through senior administration.

External actors — including knowledge-based institutions such as the Gender Research and Documentation Centre at Fourah Bay College as well as government bodies such as the Sierra Leone Commission for Human Rights — are encouraged by the existence of the SLPFSA as they see its potential for challenging internal discrimination against women. For the SLPFSA, NGOs, CSOs, government institutions, universities, and international organizations represent untapped sources of training, materials, information, support, and events for its members. External organizations can assist the SLPFSA review of policies and practices of the SLP, such as the upcoming internal review, which is not gender sensitive in its design.⁸¹ There is particular interest in better understanding the policing experience of women as well as supporting the role of oversight bodies.⁸² Gender equality is a priority programming issue for many donors, and there is still a focus on SSR. Therefore, donor support for SLPFSA programming is a possibility. SLPFSA members stated that they would require assistance in developing proposals and grant management. However, they are concerned about overstepping their boundaries with donors who are already supporting the SLP and do not want to divert funding away from the SLP as a whole. In order for this to work, there must be better coordination among all stakeholders and the SLP must understand and respect the goals of the SLPFSA.

Lobbying and advocacy are areas where the SLPFSA is organizationally weak, and wary of engaging in, but could be worth the effort if the association wishes to grow in importance. Due to the dependence the SLPFSA currently has on the SLP executive, the association must tread carefully in regards to conducting these activities overtly. A good understanding of the SLP Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Policy, which covers issues such as women's health and well-being as well as discrimination, sexual harassment, and assault, may be able to support some lobbying efforts since the association would have the backing of an official policy (Office of the Inspector General 2008). Yet a more prominent advocacy and lobbying role could increase the relevance of the association to the general police body. During discussions, members of the SLPFSA identified a number of challenges that they could champion for its members, such as poor sanitation, lack of dedicated bathroom facilities at police stations, and Police Hospital coverage of gynecologic problems, many of which are not concerns for female police officers alone. Bringing forward concerns of all police officers in addition to the concerns of female officers could increase support for lobbying and advocacy efforts should the SLPFSA seriously consider building this role.

Conclusions

⁷⁹ Interview with Naasu Fofana (2011).

⁸⁰ Interview with Marsella MaCauley (2011).

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² UNIPSIL is interested in learning about policing experiences and sees the SLPFSA as a potential resource for this knowledge (interview with Naasu Fofana). DFID SSR funding for 2011–2014 will focus more on changing police culture rather than supporting hard costs (interview with Sonia Warner).

Whether the SLPFSA contributes to the SSR process, in general, and gender-sensitive reform, in particular, is questionable. The SLPFSA could be seen as a by-product of the SSR process that opened the space for women to participate, actively and democratically, in their police service. The association has the potential to create change within the organization, but so far change has been limited and the result of the work of a few individual senior women.

The SLPFSA has much it can be proud of: the SLPFSA is active in the sense that it meets regularly and provides an important outlet for female police officers within a male-dominated service; male presence at the meetings allows for a wider understanding of the association's purpose and helps mainstream gender equity throughout the service; moreover, the existence of the association throughout most of the country means that officers are connected to each other and can discuss common issues.

Yet a number of key challenges currently restrict it from growing into a more meaningful entity. First, the larger role that the SLPFSA wishes to occupy requires greater autonomy as an organization. One possibility would be to consider separating the two, becoming semi-independent or exploring other ways to help make the association otherwise become more autonomous. In Sierra Leone, it is illegal for police officers to have a union, although it is unclear whether an association without a mandate to call on its members to collectively bargain or strike would be permitted. Nevertheless, exploring such options as legal counsel for the association can create opportunities to challenge policies and practices, as a body without any one member "taking the fall" for challenging the status quo. Moreover, gaining more autonomy would likely increase SLPFSA's legitimacy, elevating its fundraising potential, ability to hold bank accounts, and engagement in lobbying efforts on behalf of female officers.

Second, building relations with genuine male allies will help present women's issues as something of importance to the SLP.⁸³ A number of issues raised in regard to officer welfare do not affect only women, such as lack of toilet facilities for officers at stations and lack of access to training and promotions if an officer is not favoured by senior management. In addition to the female staff association, a general staff association should be considered to push for the rights of police officers in general. It was suggested that the SLPFSA could fold into a general police association allowing women "to beat men at their own game;" however, such a move could result in diminishing the cause of gender equality without a body specifically dedicated to the promotion of women.⁸⁴

Third, the hierarchy and structure of the police service itself could be contributing to the ineffectiveness of the association. Much like the military, the police have a top-down command structure that does not value individuality. Creating the perception of equality among differently ranked individuals, as well as questioning the command structure, orders, and operations, is inherently discouraged making the shift to lobbying and sharing of responsibility difficult within a police-run association.

Although association chapters do not regularly engage with CSOs and government bodies, they do interact regularly with female staff of other SSIs. This is interesting, as the umbrella group, WISS-SL, is seen as Freetown-centric and less active. Given that women in the security sector support each other's activities and appear to meet regularly, more investigation should be carried out to determine why WISS-SL is non-functioning. Furthermore, the SLPFSA should investigate how to achieve greater exposure and connection with female staff members of other police services or SSIs regionally and internationally. Institutional links could be forged throughout the region as well as through bodies such as IAWP.⁸⁵

⁸³ Interview with Janice McLean (2011).

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Some senior-ranking members of the SLPFSA are members of IAWP; however the SLPFSA is not an institutional member of the IAWP.

Notwithstanding these challenges, there is no lack of opportunities for the SLPFSA to gain recognition and expand its services to members. Sierra Leone government bodies, international and national NGOs, the United Nations, and donors are encouraged by the existence of a female staff association within the SLP. They are interested in seeing how they can work with the association and are also willing to provide it with support, training, guidance, and materials. For partnerships to emerge, willingness will be required on the part of the SLPFSA to meet with these actors. Although partnerships with CSOs and government have not been considered previously, relationships among these actors could help address some of the issues faced by the SLPFSA in serving its members and contributing to gender-sensitive police reform. Although the association faces the challenge of gaining permission from the Executive Management Board to formally partner with external organizations, this should not limit informal interactions with CSOs, NGOs, and government institutions.

Professionalizing and Connecting the Ghana Police Ladies Association

Unlike many of its neighbours, Ghana is fortunate not to have experienced violent civil or regional war. Achieving independence in 1957, the former British colony alternated between democratic rule and authoritarian, dictatorial military governments until it transitioned to democracy in the early 1990s.⁸⁶ Since then, three elections have resulted in a peaceful transition of power between parties.

While the transition to democracy involved structural reform of the government and the security and justice sectors, it focused on the creation of internal and external oversight bodies, rather than a full-scale overhaul of the courts or SSIs. As such, improvements to the security sector, including the police, have occurred organically as a result of suggestions and investigation by the government, feedback from civil society and government parastatals, and the adherence of the Ghanaian Executive Branch to international agreements concerning human rights, including the rights of women.

The Ghana Police Service (GPS) now has one of the highest percentages of women within its ranks in West Africa, with women accounting for 12–14 per cent of police officers and 15–20 per cent of overall police personnel (Gaanderse and Valasek 2011). This was not always the case. Although women have been present in the service since 1952, until the early 1990s they were unable to serve in all positions and were relegated primarily to administrative work. Instrumental in pushing for greater representation and opportunities for women within the police service was the Police Ladies Association (POLAS), an association of female police officers representing all ranks. This association, alongside the growing women's movement in the country, helped secure the right for women to enter operational units, hold higher-ranking decision-making positions, and be eligible for peacekeeping missions with the African Union and the United Nations.

However, female police officers and POLAS itself still have a way to go to achieve gender equity within the service. Women in the police service are not as gender aware as their counterparts elsewhere in West Africa — a reflection of the lack of specific gender training they receive in Police College and lack of professional development opportunities. Although the police and other government ministries have created gender policies, Ghana itself does not have a National Action Plan on women, peace, and security in line with the country's commitment to UNSCR 1325. Although POLAS is advanced in its fundraising, activities and outreach throughout the country, it lacks links to civil society and other government agencies. Still, the potential for this highly-organized association to have a large-scale impact on gender-sensitive SSR and to improve conditions for women police officers is visible.

This case study reviews the structure, roles, responsibilities, and current activities of POLAS, as well as the security and gender reforms undertaken by the security sector in Ghana. In doing this, we assess whether POLAS contributed to and continues to contribute to the SSR process. The study will conclude by looking at opportunities that POLAS can take advantage of to continue to serve its members and improve the police service and the policing experience for Ghanaian and West African police officers.

Policing in Ghana

Police in Ghana are governed by the *Police Service Act 350* (Ghana 1970), which established parameters for the police. It has remained largely unchanged, except for an amendment in 1974 that provided further

⁸⁶ In 1960, Ghana became a republic under Kwame Nkrumah, but this government was overthrown by the military in 1966. The country returned to democratic rule in 1969 with the election of the Progress Party, but then returned to military rule in 1972. In 1979, elections were held and the country reinstated democracy, developing a constitution fashioned after that of the United States. The military overthrew this government in 1981, and the country came under the control of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) chaired by John Rawlings. Military rule continued until 1987, when the PNDC instituted democratic reforms, with a transition to full democracy and development of a new constitution — the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution (Aning and Lartey 2009).

oversight. Greater clarification can be found in the 1992 Constitution, which further explains the composition, roles, and responsibilities of the Police Council and its relationship with the executive branch of government (Aning 2006).

So far, the SSR process in Ghana has taken place primarily on the political side, creating room for parliamentary and civil oversight of the security sector as a check on misuse of power. These oversight bodies extend beyond the office of the President and parliament to include parastatal institutions such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice and civilian bodies such as the Police Complaints Agency (Aning and Lartey 2009). The Ghanaian SSR process did not involve gross retraining of the police, which speaks largely to Ghana's past. Despite switching between democratic and autocratic rule, including a military regime, Ghana has not experienced large-scale conflict or widespread human rights violations.

This does not mean that the service does not need reform. During the 1992 transition from military to democratic rule, a Presidential Report was commissioned to review the police service, and, in 1996, a second report followed up on progress made since 1992. Both reports echoed consistent problems with staffing, police training, equipment, promotions, transfers, appraisal, and discipline as well as general lack of professionalism in the police service (Aning 2006). A later study by the Center for Democratic Development showed that the police were viewed as widely corrupt (an estimated 92 per cent of Ghanaians had paid a bribe to the police) and ineffectual, pointing to larger structural issues.

Since 2003, conditions have improved: police are paid more, there are greater benefits for officers, such as improved housing, and internal oversight mechanisms, such as the Police Intelligence and Professional Standards Bureau, discourage corrupt activities. Yet, training is still considered substandard, with such areas as police accountability and human rights taught in theory without application. Complaints of illegal arrest and detainment, excessive use of force, and failure to act on complaints persist (CHRI 2007).

Gender-sensitive police reform does not feature in the constitution or subsequent commissioned assessments and reports of the GPS. Instead, the greater push for women to join the service and to play significant roles with security services emerged from international and regional commitments the Ghanaian government has made to human rights and women's rights.⁸⁷

The GPS is led by an Inspector General of Police (IGP) who is overseen by the Police Council, headed by the Vice President and the Minister of Interior (MOI). The Police Council oversees promotions, ethics, and procedures of the GPS. In practice however there is not much civilian oversight of the GPS. It is unclear what the relationship is between the MOI and the GPS and what influence the ministry has over the service. Furthermore, the President of Ghana appoints both the IGP and the Police Council, which is made up of current and former police officers.⁸⁸

Women first entered the GPS in 1952, with 12 officers. Until the early 1990s, they were relegated to administrative roles, the health service, and eventually units investigating child abuse cases and supervising female detainees. From 1952 to 1989, female enlistment was limited; during this period, only 2,000 female officers entered the service. The emergence of the women's rights movement in Ghana helped change the perception of women in non-traditional roles, and between 1989 and 2011, 5,000 female officers joined the police service. As of 2009, there are 4,900 female police officers making up approximately 22 per cent of the GPS. Women can be found in every department and have held almost

⁸⁷ Based on interviews with Adowa Bame, Executive Director of Wise, and Elvis Sadongo, Head of Social Services Department at Ghana Police Hospital (August 2011); Ghana has signed/ratified the following international conventions regarding women and gender equality: Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the African Charter on Human and People's Rights; The Women's Protocol; and the Beijing Platform for Action (Moonlight 2011).

⁸⁸ Interview with Kojo Pumpuni Asante, Senior Research Officer, Ghana Center for Democratic Development, 23 Aug. 2011.

every position with the exception of IGP. There are currently no women on the Police Council. However, in 2009, Mrs. Elizabeth Mills-Robertson was promoted to the role of acting IGP.⁸⁹

The GPS appears supportive of POLAS activities and committed to improving gender parity within the police service. Indeed, the police service has a gender policy, whereas the country does not have a National Action Plan on women, peace, and security in accordance with UNSCR 1325.⁹⁰ However, there is no mention of gender or gender mainstreaming in the GPS's new strategic plan for 2010–2014, showing that there are still gaps in the GPS' move towards gender equity (GPS 2009).

Police Ladies Association of the Ghana Police Service

The birth of POLAS marked an era of gender re-awakening in the Ghana Police Service and triggered off internal innovations which worked to the benefit of the Service and the nation as a whole (GPS Inspector General Mr. Paul Tawiah-Quaye 2009).

POLAS was founded in 1989. Initially started at GPS headquarters in Accra, the organization now has a presence throughout the country. POLAS itself is a national body with regional, and, in some areas, divisional chapters.

POLAS has a constitution and bylaws that govern its operations. On joining, each member is given a copy of the constitution. At the national level, POLAS is governed by three organizational councils: the Executive, Regional and Financial Councils. POLAS is under the direct management of the Executive Council, whose chair and vice-chair are the most senior ranking female police officers in the GPS. Other executive positions are elected.⁹¹ All interested female police officers are invited to submit their names as nominees for elected positions, although some officers are recruited for their specific skills.⁹² Elections are held every three years. The process is similar within regional POLAS chapters.

Membership in the association is mandatory. All female graduates of Police Training School are automatically enrolled for life,⁹³ they do not have the option of opting out. Male officers are not permitted to join the national association but can join some regional chapters. Civilian GPS staff members are not permitted to join POLAS. POLAS is an institutional member of the International Association of Women Police and sends representatives to IAWP conferences yearly. POLAS is also a founding member of the West African Police Women's Association (WAPWA). A senior ranking female officer from the GPS is currently an elected secretary on WAPWA's secretariat.

Members pay dues to the national association; monthly payments of GHS 2 (about US\$1.2) are automatically debited from their paycheques. Some regional chapters collect additional dues at meetings.⁹⁴ These revenues are deposited into a bank account and the interest is invested. Retired officers no longer pay dues, but instead receive a pension from their contributions made throughout their career. POLAS bylaws mandate an audit of all POLAS bank accounts at least once a year. National members do not have membership cards, although some regional chapters do.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Mrs. Mills-Roberston is currently the High Commissioner to Sierra Leone.

⁹⁰ The National Action Plan has been drafted and is awaiting Cabinet approval and development of a monitoring plan. (Telephone interview with Afua Ansre, National Program Coordinator, UNWomen, Ghana, 28 Oct. 2011).

⁹¹ Elected positions in the national association include Secretary, Vice Secretary, Treasurer, Financial Secretary, Welfare Officer and Organising Secretary. In regional chapters, this varies slightly; for example, in Kumasi, elected positions include Secretary, Treasurer, Finance Officer, and Transportation Secretary, in addition to an Organization Secretariat.

⁹² For example, POLAS's Financial Secretary was approached initially to be Treasurer because she is a chartered accountant.

⁹³ Police Training School is basic training for a new police recruit. A POLAS member remains a member for life, even after retirement.

⁹⁴ This amount varies: GHS2 for the regional association in Kumasi and GHS1 for the Accra Regional Association is collected at each meeting. Payments are tracked on the back of the membership card.

⁹⁵ The card for the Kumasi chapter has the aims of the organization on one side and a tracking sheet for dues collection on the other.

Other female security sector staff associations exist in Ghana, but there is no umbrella group. Stakeholders are aware of the umbrella associations in Sierra Leone and in Liberia, and would like to have a similar body in Ghana. There is no general staff association for police officers either, but police officers maintain links with their graduation class. Classmates meet regularly and act as a network and support structure for each other. In some cases, class cohort allegiances are stronger than POLAS membership. The view was expressed that the GPS is not ready for a general staff association. Women, however, still face particular hurdles within the service and, therefore, require an exclusive organization until the patriarchal system is removed.

Meetings occur once a month regionally as well as nationally. They are held during the day, so that most women can attend. Most women in Accra do not attend their regional meetings because it is more convenient to go to the national POLAS meeting. Regional executive members attend national meetings quarterly, and POLAS holds an annual general meeting of members from across the country.

At meetings, discussions tend to focus on activities and upcoming events, although they occasionally include officer discipline issues, such as problems with dress code. Members also try to highlight what women are doing in policing elsewhere in Ghana and internationally. Executive members will get together before each meeting to set the agenda and propose activities. Decisions are made by consensus; however, if disagreement occurs, proposals are put to a vote.

Meeting agendas as well as other POLAS announcements are sent through police circulars, which are given to each district commander. Minutes are also shared this way. Only executive members communicate by telephone.

Although the GPS works with a variety of national and international bodies, including the United Nations system, POLAS does not collaborate with or request funding from donors or state ministries. It also does not collaborate with CSOs or NGOs. However, POLAS has corporate sponsorship and is looking to expand partnerships with corporations to provide special rates on mobile phone services for members.⁹⁶ In addition, POLAS has its own letterhead, helping to separate its activities and partnerships from official police activities.

“Arise and Shine”⁹⁷

POLAS members are aware of improvements in policing for women since the mid-1990s. They see the association as playing a key role in continuing this progress, particularly in dispelling stereotypes and proving that women can hold the same positions as men. Today, members see the association as essential for networking and as a support structure. This is most evident when women are transferred outside urban centres where there are fewer women colleagues. Regional POLAS groups become a family away from home.

Members view the inclusion of women in peacekeeping missions as POLAS’s primary achievement. Before the mid-1990s, women were not permitted to apply for such missions, but as of 2009, there were over 90 female officers on United Nations and African Union peacekeeping missions.⁹⁸ Lobbying efforts by POLAS, along with a favourable administration, contributed to this change. POLAS’ lobbying efforts also contributed to the adoption of the new Domestic Violence bill in Ghana, seen as a major step forward for women’s rights and protecting vulnerable populations. International networking is another cited

⁹⁶ They have also secured corporate sponsorship for events, such as the association’s anniversary celebrations.

⁹⁷ POLAS official slogan.

⁹⁸ Women were not permitted by Ghanaian authorities to join United Nations peacekeeping missions before the conflict in the Balkans (POLAS 2009). Now, not only female police officers, but also female officers in the Ghanaian military serve on international peacekeeping missions.

achievement of POLAS. Association with such international bodies as the IAWP is raising awareness of policing in Ghana, and thus contributing towards the advancement of women.

POLAS serves a number of roles. Members often speak on behalf of officers and provide mediation if personal disputes between female officers disrupt professional activities. Networking is an obvious function of the association. POLAS's function in linking female police officers of all ranks is valuable, as it is otherwise difficult for junior officers to meet more senior-ranking officers because of the rigidity of the hierarchy within the GPS as well as the security systems at national and regional GPS headquarters.⁹⁹ Networking events are opportunities for mentorship; young female police officers can also obtain career advice, and senior officers gain an understanding of what female recruits face today. Even female officers who are not active members of POLAS derive benefit from the association. As a support structure, it is a venue to air grievances and an ideal informal channel for dealing with sensitive matters.¹⁰⁰

Some POLAS chapters organize general interest workshops — including sewing and cooking courses — in conjunction with their meetings. Association chapters have brought in marriage counsellors and health professionals to teach women how to conduct breast self-examinations, for example. Sporting events, dances, and other fundraisers are often held in cooperation with, or at least open to, women from other female justice and security sector staff associations. Most recently, POLAS held a joint event with the Ghanaian Federation of Women Lawyers, an activity they would like to continue.

Association chapters give back to their communities through charity work but also use opportunities such as social events and cultural practices to build camaraderie and a better police service. Charity work commonly focuses on supporting children's homes, but also extends inward. In the past, for example, POLAS members have raised money to build a holding cell for juvenile detainees at a police station in Accra, so that young people do not have to share a cell with adults. Moreover, in Ghana, it is common for companies, ministries, services, CSOs, churches, and other organizations to print their own batik fabric with their symbol on it. Each POLAS chapter is associated with at least one fabric design, and some have a batik for work and events and another for funerals.¹⁰¹ Both charity work and participation in cultural practices promotes POLAS as an organization but also binds the members together as a unit.

POLAS appears to act primarily as a welfare organization for its members. Those who are hospitalized, marry, or lose a family member receive a small sum of money to cover some of the costs.¹⁰² This is in addition to serving as a social network, as well as conducting outreach and charitable activities in the community. According to the constitution, the organization is also supposed to engage in lobbying, awareness raising, and advocacy on behalf of its members, and to support, encourage, and provide opportunities for professional development. In these aspects, the organization is lacking.

POLAS does not develop resources, such as information pamphlets and other materials for its members. It has only produced one publication — in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the association — which

⁹⁹ At national headquarters, for example, one needs an appointment and security clearance to be on the floors where senior-ranking officers have offices.

¹⁰⁰ If a police officer feels aggrieved, she must lodge a formal complaint in writing. It then passes through the entire chain of command and is reviewed by superiors in the officer's division as well as human resources. If the officer's supervisors are party to the grievance, the officer has the option of omitting them from the letter chain; however, they will be notified that a complaint has been lodged against them. This makes some officers uncomfortable and unwilling to complain, particularly in instances of sexual harassment and assault. At the time of writing, the President of POLAS is the head of Human Resources, which was felt to be particularly advantageous because officers can air grievances without going through the formal, public process.

¹⁰¹ In Accra, some offices are implementing African Dress Fridays (similar to casual dress Fridays in North America). Plain clothes police officers are invited to wear West African clothing rather than Western business attire.

¹⁰² Hospitalisation support is given only to members. Bereavement payments are provided on the death of a member (GHS 200) and for the loss of a spouse, child, or parent (GHS 100). The stipend for a wedding is GHS 50; hospitalization, GHS 20; and for retirement, resignation, or dismissal, 80 per cent of the member's total contribution to the fund.

was distributed to all members. POLAS does not participate in recruitment drives or outreach on behalf of the GPS.

POLAS does not present annual awards to members, although it honoured women at its 20th anniversary event. The executive pointed out that awarding women for service is not important to the association; greater importance is placed on recognition from the GPS, which requires the IGP's approval.¹⁰³

Problems Faced

No one asked you to come into the position.... You are not half a police officer (Elizabeth Dossah, Head of the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Group, GPS, 26 Aug. 2011).

POLAS is incredibly well organised and well known. However the association does face dissent from members with regard to its roles and activities, the way relationships are managed between the national and regional chapters, and the governing structure of the association. This is compounded by barriers that remain in society, which slow the process of gender-sensitive SSR and wider gender equity.

One of the primary services POLAS provides is welfare support. Welfare can best be described as financial or in-kind support to officers in times of need, celebration, and retirement. For example, if female police officers are sick and in hospital, other POLAS members will visit and bring gifts. All POLAS members — in effect all female police officers in the GPS — qualify for these services. In addition, members also receive payments from the GPS's Welfare Office,¹⁰⁴ although it may take up to a year or more to receive those funds. Members must continuously follow up by writing to the executive office regarding their welfare payments; in contrast, monthly payments into the fund are automatically debited from paycheques.

There are complaints that regional chapters of POLAS do not receive the same level of support as the national association, in terms of both information sharing and financial transfers. The national body is supposed to transfer funds to the regional chapters, but there are complaints that transfers are insufficient or non-existent. Communication is also slow, and members outside of the capital do not learn of opportunities for international training or conferences until after the due date for applications.¹⁰⁵

Within the executive, leadership is not always shared equally, with some members carrying the brunt of responsibility and finding their roles stressful. Because of the workload associated with being on the Executive Council, it was suggested that at least the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson be made full-time positions. However, this would mean the two most senior-ranking female police officers would have to give up their police posts. The system could pose a problem, because the most senior-ranking women are placed at the head of the association regardless of whether they would like the post or are the best people for the job. In addition, this can mean that the Chairperson is not necessarily located at national or regional headquarters, making coordination and communication slow and difficult, as POLAS still relies on traditional police channels of communication.¹⁰⁶

POLAS needs to defend itself against internal stereotypes. There is a perception that it primarily serves women who are closest to the executive. Currently, this is particularly advantageous because the national

¹⁰³ Interview with Fanny Aboagye, Deputy Superintendent, International Relations Directorate, GPS and POLAS Executive on 26 August 2011

¹⁰⁴ The GPS has a Welfare Office whose funding comes from a percentage of officer's paycheques. It provides payments to bereaved officers, low-cost appliances for homes, and even loans.

¹⁰⁵ For example, women in Kumasi explained that they did not find out about the call for applications to attend the IAWP conference until after the selection process was completed.

¹⁰⁶ Police circulars are approved at headquarters before they are sent out. Approval can take longer when requests come from outside headquarters.

Chairperson is the head of the Human Resources Department, fostering the belief that close ties to the executive can reduce the likelihood of unwanted transfers, for example. Furthermore, to both members and outside stakeholders, POLAS appears to be a purely social organization instead of a lobby and advocacy group promoting women's rights within the police service. For example, there is consensus that POLAS has not done much to push for women's presence on decision-making bodies such as the Police Council. Although women are found in all departments, they are prevalent only in administration. Few women are in decision-making roles in operations units, such as the Criminal Investigations Department. Of approximately 700 police stations, no more than 10 have female station commanders.¹⁰⁷ There is concern that female officers are not willing to risk their careers by engaging in lobbying and advocacy.¹⁰⁸ Yet, POLAS's public image as a social and welfare association leads CSOs to believe that it is perpetuating gender stereotypes. This concerns some female police officers who believe that without lobbying and advocacy work to balance charitable acts and social activities, POLAS simply presents an image of female police officers as the feminine, softer side of the police service, not a body that is fighting for women's rights.

Lobbying and advocacy may help dispel negative stereotypes of female police officers in general. A common view of women police — held by both female and male police officers — is that they become lazy when they are pregnant and after the birth of children. It is also a common belief that women frequently complain about their shifts and being away from their children. Moreover, women say that sexual harassment still exists and women are still pressured into sexual relations by male colleagues. If a woman says “no” to such advances, she can become isolated and publicly humiliated. If an officer wishes to complain about this or any other discrimination issue, the matter is dealt with publicly and in writing through the Disciplinary Officer. Because sexual harassment, assault, and exploitation are still taboo topics, women do not feel comfortable complaining to trusted female coworkers. A concerning trend is that female police officers feel that there is little they can do in the face of SGBV.

Female police officers lack confidence.¹⁰⁹ Women are reluctant to take on certain roles, such as bank duty because it involves using a rifle, or posts away from their family. Women also do not wish to work outside urban areas. Although out of the city, these positions provide alternative experience, and a promotion in rank. This wariness does not only affect the woman offered the transfer, but disadvantages all police women by creating the perception that all female officers do not wish to be sent to rural postings. When such postings arise, willing female candidates are then looked over – or not even asked to apply.¹¹⁰

Female police officers also expressed the view that physical jobs require assistance from male colleagues and that women should not be doing very physical work.¹¹¹ This is concerning, as such work is a requirement of the job; failure to do it contributes to negative stereotyping and reduces the chance of promotion. These views also extend to the public, who are uncomfortable with women in security positions. For example, when a female police officer is placed on bank duty, the police receive public complaints that security is insufficient.¹¹²

Particular aspects of policing can place women at a disadvantage compared with their male counterparts. If a female police officer is transferred away from where her family resides, she is faced with specific challenges. Child care is not provided or subsidized by the GPS, and housing is limited, meaning that not

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Elizabeth Dossah, Head of Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit on 26 August 2011.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Kate Kwadzovi, Program Assistant at WIPSEN-Africa, 23 August 2011.

¹⁰⁹ Described as “bravery” during focus group discussions.

¹¹⁰ Tiwaa Ado Dankwa, Head of Training with Ghana Police Service and Financial Secretary of POLAS on 26 August 2011.

¹¹¹ For example, trying to subdue a physically large or strong person during an arrest.

¹¹² Interview with Elizabeth Dossah 2011.

all officers receive a residence.¹¹³ Instead, they find shelter with whomever will take them in. Recently, a female officer was reportedly raped while seeking shelter after her night shift.¹¹⁴ Female police officers also state that they feel uncomfortable on night shifts because safety precautions are not taken, such as sending officers out in pairs, and women may be responsible for patrolling dangerous areas of cities by themselves.

Nevertheless night shifts and transfers are seen as part of the job, and senior female officers have little sympathy for women who complain about the work. If women want to be considered as equals they need to do the job as equals. This, of course, does not take into account cultural differences that can account for women feeling less confident and competent in their positions than men. POLAS does lobby on behalf of women who do not wish to be transferred because of family concerns, but it is usually because her husband does not want her to be transferred. They do not intervene to stop a member's husband from being transferred or to encourage a husband to join his wife when she is transferred.

In general, institutional policies do not place women at a disadvantage to their male colleagues, except for a few that still exist formally but are rarely applied. For instance, women are not permitted to become pregnant within 18 months of graduation from Police Training School; if they do, their position may be terminated. This policy, which is indeed discriminatory, is hardly ever applied in practice, although this depends on the gender sensitivity of the Station Commander. POLAS could assist by advocating that women not be punished under this rule as similar restrictions are not placed on men's personal and family life. However, members agreed that the rule should remain, as they feel that, otherwise, women would take advantage of the benefits system without paying anything in. The view was also expressed that women should be better at family planning and prepare for their pregnancies.¹¹⁵

Most police officers, male and female, are not gender aware and do not understand power structures.¹¹⁶ Only a portion of officers receive gender training, primarily those who work in what are deemed gender-sensitive positions, such as the Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU). Thus, gender is not mainstreamed.¹¹⁷

Moreover, gender training is relatively new to Ghana. As the country has not experienced violent conflict, women's rights, peace, and security principles have been promoted with less vigour than elsewhere, and women in the governance and security sector do not understand what resolutions such as UNSCR 1325 mean for them.¹¹⁸ This is not to say that gender training and workshops focused on women, peace, and security are not occurring in the country. At the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Accra, "gender and security" is a key area of focus, but training has not focused on changing the Ghanaian system as it has in neighbouring countries.

The 10th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 saw some women, peace, and security training provided by WIPSEN-A and the Canadian High Commission. This workshop brought together a small number of women from each of the SSIs to raise awareness of the issues as well as to identify gaps in services and best practices in this area. Women in SSIs recognize that there has been an ad hoc approach to gender

¹¹³ GPS provides housing as part of its benefits, and salary is based on the assumption that housing is included. Although officer salaries are high in comparison to those in neighbouring countries, they do not make enough money to pay rent as well as daily living expenses.

¹¹⁴ There are not enough barracks for police. If police officers are transferred and there is no space for them, they must find their own accommodation. Junior officers seldom earn enough money to rent and are forced to ask around for accommodation at night. (Focus Group Discussion, Kumasi, 25 August 2011.)

¹¹⁵ GPS allows women to pool their vacation time to top-up their maternity leave of three months. There is no paternity leave.

¹¹⁶ Interview with ElvisSadongo 2011.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Kate Kwadzovi 2011.

¹¹⁸ Ibid

training, and this has resulted in women not fully understanding what gender mainstreaming means and how the women, peace, and security agenda can work for them.¹¹⁹

Moving Forward

Both POLAS members and other stakeholders provided insight into how they would like the association to progress. Primary suggestions focused on improving communication among members and increasing national and international opportunities (training and conferences) for female officers as well as opportunities for POLAS to assert itself more as a lobby and advocacy group.

Communication is a recognized weakness for POLAS. In addition to improving cellular telephone communication through partnerships with mobile corporations, POLAS would like to offer regular updates to its members. Newsletters and magazines highlighting female police achievements nationally and internationally would promote unity within the association.

Members would like to see better representation and oversight of POLAS by an external board made up of civil society representatives. This would not only create links between female police and communities, but also provide an external body to lobby the GPS to change its practices in favour of more gender-sensitive policing. Moreover, POLAS members would like to see an umbrella female security sector staff association similar to Sierra Leone's WISS-SL.

To increase the confidence of female officers, more training should be provided. POLAS could look into hosting or lobbying for refresher and specialized training in the use of firearms and encourage more co-ed drills so that male and female officers understand each other's abilities and gain confidence and trust in each another. Members would also like to see a sponsorship scheme that would allow more women to participate in international training and attend conferences such as the IAWP conference.

Although POLAS does have links with corporations and conducts some activities with other female security sector staff associations, it is interested in expanding partnerships with CSOs, NGOs, and other international bodies. Examples of such alliances can be found in Ghana. For example, organizations such as WISE, a large women's rights CSO, and the Centre for Democratic Development, a Ghanaian think tank and governance watchdog, work directly with other staff associations, including men's organizations.¹²⁰ Moreover, other female staff associations in the security sector have strong links with civil society; for example, the Prison's Ladies Association is frequently in touch with WIPSEN-A for training and technical assistance.¹²¹

The national POLAS executive has the capacity to fundraise and write project proposals. Moreover, they recognize that civil society and international organizations could provide valuable resources and services to members. For example the Women and Development CSO trains other organizations in lobbying, advocacy, and negotiations and could be partnered with to assist in finding new sources of funding.¹²² Conversely, regional POLAS executives do not see how their association could work with bodies such as CSOs and do not have the capacity to fundraise on a larger scale on their own.

In terms of advocacy, members would like to see POLAS lobby for better working conditions, so that police can provide better services. For example, officers who work in DOVVSU complain that they are relegated to tiny offices, in which several officers share a desk. It is difficult to uphold principles of confidentiality on sensitive issues when there is no privacy. Adequate housing, promotion of women, and

¹¹⁹ Interview with Diedrah Kelly and Eunice Dadsu, Political/Economic Relations and Public Affairs, Canadian High Commission in Ghana on 24 August 2011

¹²⁰ Based on interviews with Adowa Bame, and Kojo Pumpuni Asante 2011.

¹²¹ Interview with Kate Kwadzovi 2011.

¹²² Completed questionnaire by Patricia Formadi, Director of Women and Development sent via email on 20 September 2011

safer work conditions are other needs that POLAS can push for. Furthermore, members of the national POLAS executive and senior ranking officers recognize that a woman's traditional role as mother and homemaker can clash with policing responsibilities. Not enough in-country research has been done to investigate the points where women face difficulty, how they cope with problems, and what the police service and POLAS can do to better support female staff members when their work and home responsibilities collide. POLAS is interested in investigating this further.¹²³

There is acknowledgement that mentorship and networking are key services that POLAS can provide. Career counseling and mentoring do not exist formally in the police service. If a police officer is lucky, he or she will have friends or connections who are willing to provide advice.¹²⁴ In the coming year, POLAS will be piloting a mentorship program for young female officers, starting at GPS headquarters, but to be rolled out across the country if it is successful.¹²⁵ The program will be used not only to convey knowledge from senior female police officers to younger colleagues, but also to determine the current conditions for young officers and work together to improve the policing experience.

Finally, POLAS members have suggestions to improve cultural perceptions of gender and gender roles. The GPS has a Wives Association, but officers would like to see an association for husbands as well. Members noted that the stigma around women earning equal (or greater) pay and benefits than their husbands needs to be broken down, and, if husbands met, they could support each other through this cultural shift.¹²⁶

Conclusion

SSR in Ghana did not outright call for gender sensitivity or equity, deferring to the constitution as well as international agreements concerning human and women's rights as a basis for improving conditions for female police officers. Instead the process increased the level of oversight over the security sector to include parliamentary and external bodies to feed into police policies and procedures. New opportunities have allowed internal officers to review the function of the police service as well and, in theory, should allow for an association such as POLAS to contribute to changing the GPS.

In the past, POLAS has contributed to the reform process by working specifically to improve access to training, deployments, and promotions of women. In its current state, members feel that POLAS's advocacy role should be revitalized. Undeniably, great potential exists for POLAS to advocate, not only on behalf of women, but also for all police officers as many of the complaints police officers have regarding their work are not gender specific. This potential is derived from the critical mass of members as well as the ability of the association to channel issues from lower to very senior ranks to reach the ear of the IGP. Changes in staffing, training, promotions, discipline, and general officer welfare would speak to the reforms called for in previous government-mandated reviews of the GPS (CHRI 2007).¹²⁷

Despite not including gender mainstreaming efforts in the police reform process nor having a National Action Plan on women, peace, and security, the GPS and Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs both provide thorough gender mainstreaming policies. The policies focus on improving gender parity and ensuring that women are empowered through mentorship and support. With regard to gender mainstreaming, POLAS is currently playing an important role in empowering and supporting female police officers through networking events, support during times of hardship, and public exposure. POLAS

¹²³ Interview with Elizabeth Dossah 2011

¹²⁴ Interview with Elvis Sadongo 2011

¹²⁵ Interview with Elizabeth Dossah 2011

¹²⁶ This suggestion came out of a conversation during a focus group discussion on civilian husbands who are unwilling to use the free health care benefits that their family receives because they do not want to appear to be relying on their wife's pay and benefits.

¹²⁷ The Ghanaian parliament has formed several Committees of Inquiry into issues involving police performance since 1951. In recent history, the most notable committee reports have been the Ryan Report (1992) and the Archer Commission (1996) which laid the ground work for further reform of the GPS.

is a well-known organization and its public face can help sensitize the public toward women in non-traditional fields of employment such as law enforcement. It will continue to support and empower young female officers through its new mentorship program.

There are limits to the success of POLAS. The fact that the chairperson and vice-chairperson are appointed rather than elected causes frustration among members who wish to play a more active role. Although the current practice may assign an executive that was not involved in POLAS prior to their appointment, it does permit access to the upper echelons of the police service in terms of suggesting and pushing for reform. It appears that POLAS is addressing this issue by allowing non-executive members to head POLAS projects and engage younger officers in POLAS activities.

It was noted that most officers in the GPS do not receive in-depth gender training, which is reserved for those in departments dealing with domestic violence and children. Yet the GPS and the national government have progressive policies concerning women and gender equality. Women are in senior ranks of the police service and make up 15 to 20 per cent of the police service — one of the highest percentages in the region. Unlike Ghana's West African neighbours, who have experienced conflict that included widespread sexual violence, there has not been the same gendered focus in reform of the security sector. Improvements in gender equity have instead stemmed from an evolving women's movement and government reform committed to human rights. However because there had been no concerted effort to provide gender training to security services, women are not as aware of international, regional, and national agreements on gender equity and the empowerment of women. Moreover, women lack an understanding of power structures and how traditional gender roles as mothers may hinder the ability for women to perform their roles as police officers to the same level as men. This can only improve with more women and men becoming knowledgeable about women's rights and what gender equity entails.

A way to improve POLAS members' gender knowledge as well as their ability to advocate effectively is to link with civil society. CSOs can provide resources and training, and they have the leeway to advocate on behalf of women in the security sector on topics that are too sensitive or close for POLAS to take on. The formation of an oversight board made up of civil society members could increase this flexibility and, hopefully, improve civilian understanding of the police service and vice versa. CSOs can also work with POLAS to build programs for female officers as well as civilians who are eligible for funding from donors interested in women, peace, and security issues. POLAS has already received sponsorship from private corporations and is financially self-sufficient through member support and financial investments. However, it could do more for its community of members and civilians.

In addition to working with CSOs and other stakeholders, POLAS can also take the first step in setting up an umbrella female staff association for the security sector. POLAS already interacts with female staff associations through social events, but they do not work together on professional issues that concern all women in the security sector. Banding together can further efforts of gender sensitive security sector reform, and provide another level of support to women in SSIs.

POLAS is an incredibly well-organized association. Members are fully aware of its potential and are slowly implementing creative solutions to address its shortcomings. POLAS is an excellent example for other female security sector staff associations in the region, as well as further abroad. Thus, support for dialogue and interaction between POLAS and its West African peers, in particular, should be considered.

Findings, Lessons Learned and Conclusion

Many of the key findings of this research that identify options for others stem from POLAS. The Ghana association is the most developed and, therefore, provided researchers with a broad list of suggestions that can be shared with West African neighbours as well as a wider audience. The associations play an important role for female police officers and in the wider SSR process but they are not realizing their full potential. From the research, the following key findings can be identified:

1. Organizational development should be association driven, so that there is buy-in from the members. The continued success of Ghana's POLAS can be attributed to the fact that it was a Ghanaian-led and Ghana-developed organization.
2. Organizational management, as well as financial and strategic planning, is lacking. Capacity building in these areas is needed and should include fundraising techniques, such as proposal writing and business development.
3. Training provided by international and regional actors should be developed alongside staff associations. Such training must be in depth and provided by local people to ensure an appropriately nuanced understanding of context and to facilitate ownership, if possible.
4. Ghanaian police officers have not benefited from the same emphasis on gender in their training as those in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Currently, gender training is provided to officers working in specific departments such as Domestic Violence Victim Support Units and external stakeholders have only recently engaged female SSI staff in supporting gender practices and international agreements directly affecting women. Although Ghanaian police officers understand the basic principles of gender equity, they lack an understanding of international norms.¹²⁸
5. Female officers in Sierra Leone and Ghana are gender aware at a basic level but lack a more nuanced understanding of gender roles and power structures. This should be emphasized in any future gender training provided.
6. Mentorship of younger officers is an area where all three associations fall short. Little is done to include junior officers in association management or to help them grow as officers.
7. Lack of confidence on the job appears to be a universal issue for female police officers. This comes through in the requests for capacity building, basic police training, and leadership training. Currently, female staff associations are not specifically addressing this issue.
8. Female staff associations are not working with fellow women's organizations, other civil society actors, international organizations, or donors. In fact, in Liberia and Sierra Leone, these actors are not aware of the existence of the female staff associations. Associations do interact with fellow female staff associations and, in the case of Ghana, private enterprise for the purpose of fundraising.
9. The primary functions of the female police staff associations, as stipulated in their mandates, are still limited to contributing to cultural change within the police service. Although this is a contribution to gender sensitive police reform, the associations rarely contribute to gender sensitive external operations and public interactions of the police services.¹²⁹
10. Active and visible advocacy and lobbying on behalf of female officers and women's advancement in the police service, in general, are not areas that the associations are involved in at this time. Quiet lobbying by influential individuals within the organizations appears to be the preferred method for challenging decisions or policies that adversely affect members.
11. Female police staff associations are not fully independent of the police services. They use internal police service communication systems, such as bulletins and morning meetings, to provide information to their members, use department common areas for meetings, and conduct meetings

¹²⁸ Examples of international norms and tools are the Beijing Platform, UNSCR 1325, and the Gender and SSR Toolkit by DCAF, Instraw, and OSCE/ODIHR.

¹²⁹ Only one solid example exists of police associations contributing to external policy changes: POLAS contributed to the lobbying effort for the new Domestic Violence bill in Ghana.

during work hours. The SLPFSA uses SLP letterhead. Being so closely linked with police services could hamper opportunities to overtly advocate on behalf of female police officers.

12. Leadership and management are not shared equally among members of the executive of the female staff associations. Without knowledge-sharing, associations run the risk of losing institutional gains when a key member of the executive leaves, such as the case of the LNPWA.

Conclusion

On the surface, the female staff associations do not appear to outwardly challenge their police services to be more gender sensitive in their policies, procedures, and practices. Advocacy is noticeably weak and the progress that has been made can be attributed to the drive and influence of a handful of strong female leaders rather than the association as a whole. Female staff associations are social groups and support networks rather than women's rights lobby and advocacy organizations. They are permitted to exist because they are perceived not to pose a threat to the status quo.

Yet, this research project is not intended to discount the significance of the associations as a space for women, nor the impact they have had for women in the security sector and their potential to influence SSI development. Major hindrances to female police advancement cited in all three case studies were lack of confidence and capacity on the job coupled with negative stereotypes and traditional views of a woman's role. Certainly, training can address some gaps in capacity of female officers, and educate colleagues on gender equality. Training cannot fully address gender insensitive practices within a police service nor can training replace a support network that provides encouragement to fellow officers to work harder, achieve more, and have confidence. Social welfare, such as bereavement payments to officers, contributes to this support by sharing a burden held by women to provide for their family. Networking to build this support system through regular meetings and information sharing give junior officers access to senior peers that they would not normally have. Although formal mentorship programs do not exist within the associations or the wider police services, these opportunities still allow for ambitious junior officers to make themselves visible and solicit knowledge from senior female police officers.

The importance of these associations is not lost among female employees of SSIs. All three female police staff associations were the first of their kind in their countries and have inspired other women within the security sector to start their own associations. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, this has extended to umbrella associations or wings for all female staff in the security sector. The associations and their founders are pioneers of relatively new organizations. It must be remembered that not only are the staff associations relatively new, but the push for women in decision-making roles in the police service is also only a decade old. The associations have laid a solid foundation to build organizations that can assist in gender sensitive police reform more overtly, should the associations take advantage of the tools they have at their disposal. Such tools include civil society, including fellow female staff associations nationally and internationally, the police service itself, and most importantly their members.

This research demonstrated that the associations are valued and have the potential to grow into much more influential bodies. Although Liberia's LNPWA faces the biggest challenge — an existential crisis — it has a base from which to start. Inter-regional sharing could assist in organizational development as associations in Sierra Leone and Liberia could learn from POLAS's professionalism and accomplishments. Ghanaians would also like to develop their own umbrella association and can learn greatly from the experience of their West African peers. More sharing of good practices among female police staff associations, other female security staff associations, and women's organizations in each country — both regionally and internationally — is needed. In West Africa as well as globally, the ways in which female staff members within the security sector influence the culture and practices of their institutions is an under-researched topic.

The continuing study of police reform is imperative. In terms of security, police institutions have the greatest amount of interaction and, therefore, impact on the day-to-day lives of people. Their ability to provide adequate public security as a public service contributes to the stability and, thus, the development of a country. Our research was limited to three countries in West Africa with female police staff associations in SSR contexts. It would be useful, however, if future research into this question included comparisons of security sector progress between states with female police staff associations and those without.

Policy and Practice Recommendations

For female police staff associations in West Africa

1. Encourage regional dialogue between female police staff associations.
2. Look to national resources available to support female police staff association members, such as women's rights organizations, for training and assistance with organizational development and fundraising.
3. Consider partnerships with civil society members to assist with lobbying and advocacy efforts on behalf of members. Where advocacy is difficult, share information or suggestions on what members of the association would like to see changed for female police officers, so that women's advocacy groups can highlight female police needs.
4. Create or renew a board of directors that can oversee the executive management of the association. Ensure that members are not all from the security sector, so that the board can represent the association when advocacy and lobbying are required.
5. Promote the activities of the association publicly. In doing this, actively work to dispel negative stereotypes of female police officers both internally and externally.
6. Seek partnerships with grant-giving organizations, nationally, regionally, and internationally. Supporters of women's organizations and gender-sensitive SSR can provide funding for activities that associations would like to provide to their members.
7. Seek partnerships with corporations for sponsorship. Lessons can be learned from POLAS, which currently receives sponsorship and support from corporations that would like to engage in corporate social responsibility activities. This has allowed them to finance a 20th anniversary publication and other activities for their members.
8. Improve communication with members outside capital cities and police headquarters. Ensure that opportunities are equally provided to all members, such as training and information regarding international conferences. This will maintain a strong network of members and ensure greater support for officers.
9. Engage male officers and other allies in all activities. Encourage men's involvement in advocacy and awareness efforts. Moreover, explore the possibility of a general police federation where general employment issues can be addressed in addition to gender equity.

For the LNPWA

1. Take productive steps, such as those suggested in the focus group discussion, to revitalize the LNPWA. An initial meeting of executive members and other interested parties, followed by a general meeting would be positive first steps.
2. Rewrite the LNPWA constitution and ensure that every member has a copy. Look specifically at the questions of membership as well as executive term limits.
3. Seek partnerships with local civil society, government, and international actors present in Liberia for assistance and training. Reach out to potential international partners for fundraising opportunities.
4. Revisit the purpose and role of an LNPWA board of directors. The board could have the ability to take over management of the LNPWA in times of weak leadership and assist in fundraising and lobbying efforts, particularly through its current high-profile membership.
5. Take steps to repair the relationship with LINLEA and LIFLEA. Umbrella groups can provide support and leverage as a lobbying and advocacy group as well as a source of funding.

For the SLPFSA

1. Conduct strategic budgeting, fundraising, and organizational planning. If the expertise does not exist within the association, reach out to local and international actors present in Sierra Leone to assist. Ensure that regional chapter executives are included in the process.

2. Take steps to create some independence from the SLP so that larger-scale external fundraising and public promotion of the organization can be carried out. Such steps as creating an association letterhead could assist with this. If this is still not possible, steps to improve the function and abilities of WISS-SL as a fundraising and advocacy body could help.
3. Look into regular and more in-depth gender training for SLPFSA members. Female police officers, particularly those outside the capital, are lacking a gendered perspective in reviewing their workplace policies and procedures and could benefit from a better understanding of power structures, gender equity, and international norms.
4. Institute mentorship programs or schemes pairing junior officers with more senior ranking officers. This promotes cohesiveness among female officers and can counter bad habits such as truancy, address uniform issues, and combat negative stereotypes of female officers.
5. Take greater steps toward providing counselling and support to members who are SGBV survivors or have faced sexual harassment and exploitation. Counselling should include support through formal and informal investigations and complaints, as well as assistance in seeking outside services. SLPFSA should work with members to encourage women not to demonize each other's private and sexual relationships.
6. Look into institutional membership in international bodies, such as the IAWP, to gain greater understanding of how female police staff associations operate elsewhere as well as of the gender mainstreaming and equity efforts of other police services.
7. Create links with women's organizations, CSOs, NGOs, and international bodies to explore links for partnerships and access to their services for members.

For POLAS

1. Consider creating an umbrella staff association with fellow female security sector staff associations. Lessons and good practices can be drawn from experiences in Liberia and Sierra Leone.
2. Ensure that strategic planning includes executive council members from regional POLAS chapters and that capacity building for them is regionally inclusive as well.
3. Explore the possibility of offering gender training to all members or even co-hosting gender training for all police officers. Ghanaian police officers have not benefited from the same amount of formal gender awareness. Further exploration of gaps in policies and practices within the police service through gender workshops is also suggested.
4. Engage in lobbying and advocacy on behalf of members. Explore the possibility of having an external body, such as a board of directors or a lawyer, as a pressure group representing the organization if direct advocacy and lobbying efforts place women's employment at risk.
5. Link with civil society, other government bodies, and international actors for further partnership, training, and fundraising opportunities.
6. Review the association's governance structure and allow for more opportunities for women to be involved in its management. Ensure that workloads are shared among executive members.
7. Expanding the proposed mentorship program nationally to improve professional development opportunities for junior officers and offer support to peer associations starting their own mentorship programs.
8. Improve the timeliness of welfare payouts. Currently, there is too great a delay before officers receive their payments. A review of the system and possible decentralization could assist in speeding up the process.
9. Consider sharing POLAS's experiences and exposure regionally with peer associations in West Africa, either by restarting WAPWA or through other means.

For national and international stakeholders and donors

1. Explore opportunities for partnerships among female staff associations in the security sector to improve knowledge-sharing and security sector monitoring and reform efforts. Investigating entry points for such opportunities could assist with women's leadership and gender training.
2. Permit and encourage general staff associations. Many of the complaints from female police officers regarded poor conditions shared by their male colleagues. A general staff association could work to improve the welfare of all officers.
3. Share information regarding services, activities, conferences, and funding opportunities with female staff associations within the security sector.
4. Solicit advice on policy changes or new policies in the security sector from female staff associations. Police services and relevant stakeholders should create opportunities to liaise with female police staff association representatives for advice or feedback on decisions that may directly affect female police officers, including during the creation of SSR programs.
5. Work to actively combat negative female stereotypes and cultural barriers that could prevent women from joining SSIs or create a negative perception of women in the security sector. Efforts could include support for public education campaigns and internal awareness raising and workshops.
6. Facilitate networking opportunities for women. Ensure that female staff associations in the security sector are invited.
7. Consider assisting umbrella associations for SSIs in organizational development, fundraising, and support to their members.
8. Ensure sustainability and retention of skills learned in professional development opportunities. Make sure that all training is driven by female staff associations so that it fits their needs. All training and capacity building should be long-term investments, with coordination among all relevant stakeholders to reduce duplication of efforts.
9. Continue to make available positive female role models in the security sector, for example by assigning all-female police battalions to peacekeeping operations. Encourage United Nations mission representatives to seek out female staff associations within the security sector to gain alternative perspectives on the SSR process.

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Appendix A – Research Methods

Considerable background research was undertaken for this project. These activities included: primary interviews with members of police associations and peer researchers, a literature review on police unions and minority associations and of SSR programs' attention to gender, as well as desk research on the case study countries. These methods were supplemented by a review of primary policy documents and websites, documents from relevant civil society organizations, United Nations reports and scholarly articles. The primary researcher was assisted by three field-based research consultants — one in each case study country. All information is based on material gathered from focus group discussions and interviews between April and October 2011.

In all, 31 interviews were conducted with police officers, civil society members, government representatives, and representatives of international donors and organizations in Canada, South Africa, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ghana. In addition, five focus group discussions were held in the case study locations. A common set of questions was used for both focus group discussions and the interviews (See Appendix B). Focus group participants as well as the researcher and research consultants were women. This gender segregation was maintained to increase the comfort level of the participants when speaking about gender-sensitive issues, such as gender discrimination in the workplace. The questions were open ended and modified to fit the expertise or the subject area of inquiry. In some cases, questionnaires were completed after the fieldwork and submitted to the researchers via email.¹³⁰ The case studies were conducted during August 2011.

In addition to gender, other ethical considerations were taken into account. Because of the nature of the research, only adult women were invited to participate; therefore, special considerations for minors were not needed. Moreover, to build trust and encourage participation, focus group participants agreed on ground rules for discussion at the beginning of each session.

Focus group participants were identified by the research consultants in consultation with the NSI researcher. The primary researcher and research consultants in each country ensured that the principles of informed consent were strictly observed. All participants were informed of the purpose of the project, the process and how the information they provided would be used. They were also advised that they had the right to remain anonymous unless they specified otherwise. At the beginning of the discussion, the research team made sure that all participants were aware that they were participating voluntarily and that they were free to leave at any time if they no longer wished to participate. The same principles applied to interviews.

Because of limited resources and lack of capacity to provide psychosocial support to interviewees and focus group participants, the research did not actively seek women who identified as survivors of SGBV, nor did the discussion solicit experiences from women who identified as survivors. Given the contexts in which the study operated, researchers did realize that members of focus groups and interviewees may identify as survivors of SGBV. A large body of literature documenting experiences and addressing the challenges faced by female survivors of SGBV exists, and our desk research draws on this. In addition, the research team took care to speak with organizations that work with survivors to fill this gap in the research.

At each location, specific modifications to the basic method were made to adjust to the context as well as logistics.

¹³⁰ Sample questionnaires can be found in the annex.

Liberia

The research team held three-hour discussions with two focus groups with 17 participants each for a total of 34 participants. Focus group participants were all Liberia National Police female officers of various ranks and from different divisions. Eight one-on-one interviews were conducted in Liberia as well as Ghana with stakeholders from government ministries, non-governmental organizations and United Nations staff.¹³¹ In addition to primary research methods, secondary review of the literature on the subject matter was undertaken.

The focus groups were intended to be guided by open-ended questions on the structure, role, and perceptions of the Liberia National Police Women's Association. However, both focus group discussions quickly turned into workshops when it became evident that the LNPWA was no longer a functioning body and that there was unease among the participants. The women wanted to use the time to identify the main issues faced by the organization and work on steps to re-establish the LNPWA. As a result, this case study takes a slightly different approach to the topic, with emphasis on organization building and conflict mitigation, rather than simply the structure and functions of the association.¹³² Because of the short time spent in the country, security and transport concerns, and limits on the availability of the research consultant, focus group discussions could only be conducted in the capital, Monrovia. Although participants came from various parts of the country and some had previous experience working as a police officer outside the capital, the Monrovia-centric focus of the study is a recognized shortcoming.

Interviews were based on open-ended questions that focused on the SSR process, women in police and civil society, and government interactions or partnerships with the police, specifically the LNPWA. It should be noted that the research was conducted during a referendum period and at the start of a congressional and presidential election campaign. Therefore, a number of potential interviewees were not available during or after the fieldwork.¹³³

Sierra Leone

Researchers held two three-hour focus group discussions with female police officers of various ranks in the Sierra Leone Police. The first took place in Freetown at SLP headquarters and the second in Bo in the Southern Region. Research was primarily based in Freetown, the capital, where key stakeholders and the national chapter of the Sierra Leone Police Female Staff Association were located. Bo was selected to gain the perspective of officers outside the capital.

Each focus group discussion included 10 participants.¹³⁴ In Bo, these were primarily senior-ranking officers, but in Freetown there was greater variety in terms of ages and ranks. In addition, 12 interviews were held with members of the SLP, members of other female security sector staff associations, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, the Sierra Leone Human Rights Commission, local and international NGOs operating in Sierra Leone and in Ghana, representatives from the United Nations, and donors concerned with SSR.¹³⁵ All interviewees were female, except for one male police officer.

¹³¹ Ministry of National Security, Search for Common Ground, the Foundation for Human Rights and Democracy, the International Center for Transitional Justice, the Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia, International Alert, the Women Peace and Security Network Africa (WIPSEN-A) and the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

¹³² There is an umbrella female SSI staff association in Liberia — the Liberian Female Law Enforcement Association (LIFLEA). The researchers did not speak with a representative from this organization because of tensions between LIFLEA and the LNPWA.

¹³³ For example, researchers were unable to secure interviews with representatives of the legislature, organizations with a mandate that includes civic education or donors.

¹³⁴ Given the sensitive nature of the conversation, names are not provided.

¹³⁵ The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces Serving Sisters; Women in Security Sector Reform, Sierra Leone; International Rescue Committee; Campaign for Good Governance and WIPSEN-A. Most meetings were arranged by the research associate in-country by email and telephone, except for interviews with the Chief Police Section of Interpol, WIPSEN-A, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone, the United Nations Police and the UK Department for International Development.

Focus group discussion questions centred around understanding the perceptions of members about the structure, roles, and responsibilities of the SLPFSA and its executive; gaining insight into what being a female police officer means in Sierra Leone; and the impact of the SSR process on gender relations in the SLP, especially in terms of the development of gender-sensitive policies and programs, such as the sexual harassment and gender mainstreaming policies. Respondents also discussed the major challenges faced by women in the police service, as well as the role female officers would like to see the association play in the future.

Ghana

Researchers faced bureaucratic difficulties in trying to organize two focus group discussions and, in the end, only one was held, in Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti Region. Participants were eight female police officers of various ranks and from different departments. The discussion followed a set of open-ended questions, primarily focused on POLAS roles, activities, structure, and the policing experience for women in general. The discussion and follow-up conversation lasted approximately three hours. In place of the second focus group, seven interviews were held, one-on-one or in pairs, with female police officers and one male police officer at various police stations in Accra and at Ghana Police Service headquarters. This allowed the viewpoints of female officers from different areas of the country to be included in the study. A drawback to this change was that it reduced the amount of time available for interviews with other stakeholders.

Interviews were conducted in person or via email questionnaire with civil society and United Nations organizations.¹³⁶ They followed a questionnaire with open-ended questions modified slightly to fit the expertise of the interviewee or the area of inquiry.

¹³⁶ Interviews were held in person with representatives from WIPSEN-A, the Women's Initiative for Self Empowerment and the Center for Democratic Development; an email questionnaire was used for an interview with the Women and Development Project and UNWOMEN representatives we contacted via telephone.

Appendix B – Sample Questionnaire

Focus Group Discussions with Police Women

Duration: approx. 2 hours

1. Tour de Table / Participant Introduction – 10 minutes

2. Introduction to project – 10 mins

Purpose of project

- Research project on women's police staff association
- Their role or possible role in gender sensitive police reform

What is Security Sector Reform?

- What is Gender Sensitive Police Reform?

3. Brief Overview and Disclaimer – 10 mins

What we will be doing today?

- How the information will be used?
- Confidentiality/Comfort level
- Pictures

Questions before starting

4. General/Background Questions – 25 mins

Who is a member of the police association?

- Who is a member of the female staff association?
 - Both?
 - Others?

What is the reason you joined (or did not join) your association?

What does the association do for you?

- What would you like them to do - or do more of in your opinion?

How do you receive information of what is going on within the association?

- If you would like to hold a decision making position within the association, how do you go about doing this?
- Are there any reasons why you would not be able to hold a position?

Break – 10 - 15mins

5. Questions on Women in Policing – 35-40 mins

How do you receive information on changes in policies and practices for women in your police service?

- Is there a method for you to comment on current policies and practices that affect police women or police in general?

Are there some recent advancement or “wins” in policing for women?

- What do you see as major barriers to women in police services?
- Are there key areas of focus/trends in women and policing that the police service is focusing on changing?
- In your opinion, how much involvement do police staff associations have in removing these barriers?

When policewomen wish to complain about something - be it unfair treatment, poor policies, or harassment - what do they need to do to file a complaint?

- How do you feel about this process?
- Is there feedback to help ensure an adequate degree of service is provided?

6. Conclusion

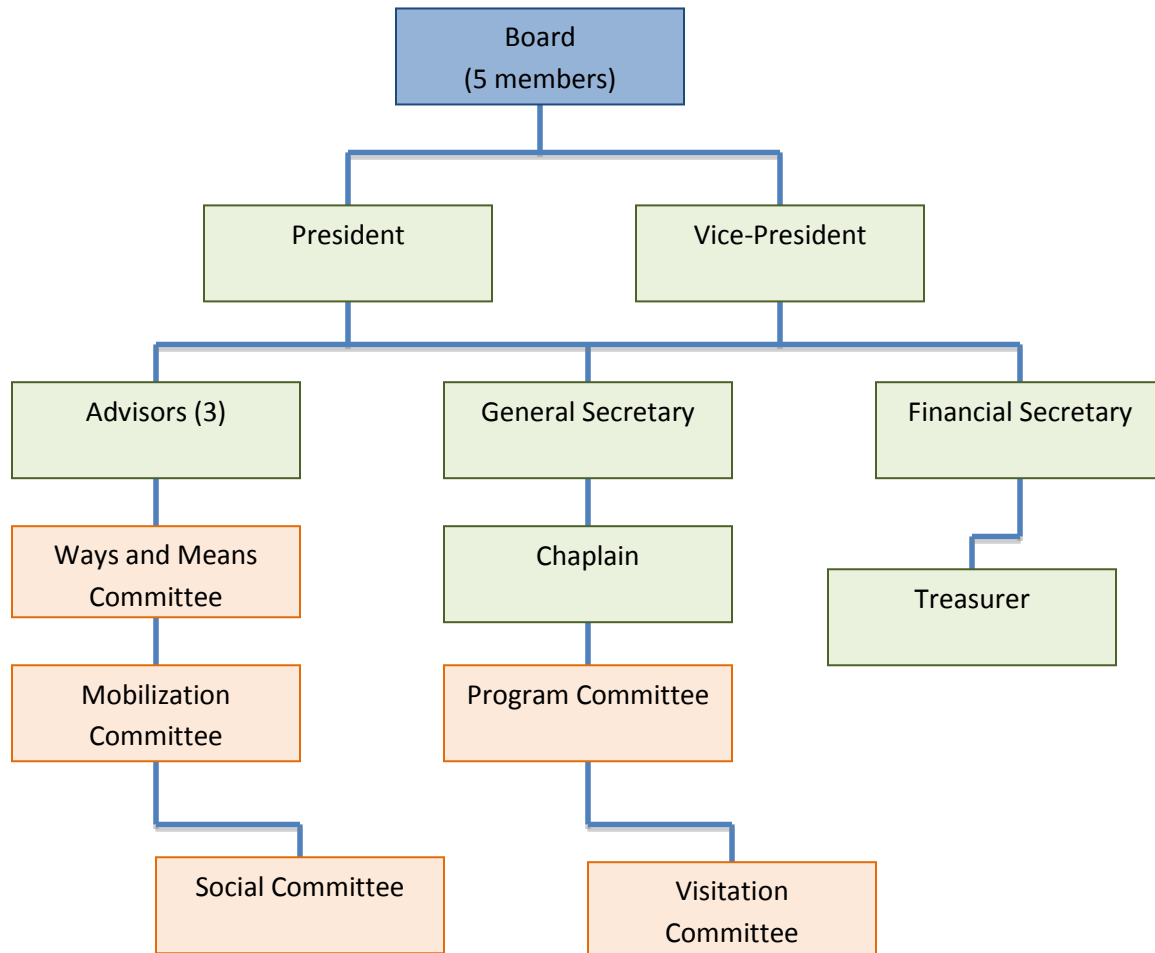
Summarise what was discussed and key points made

Further questions from participants

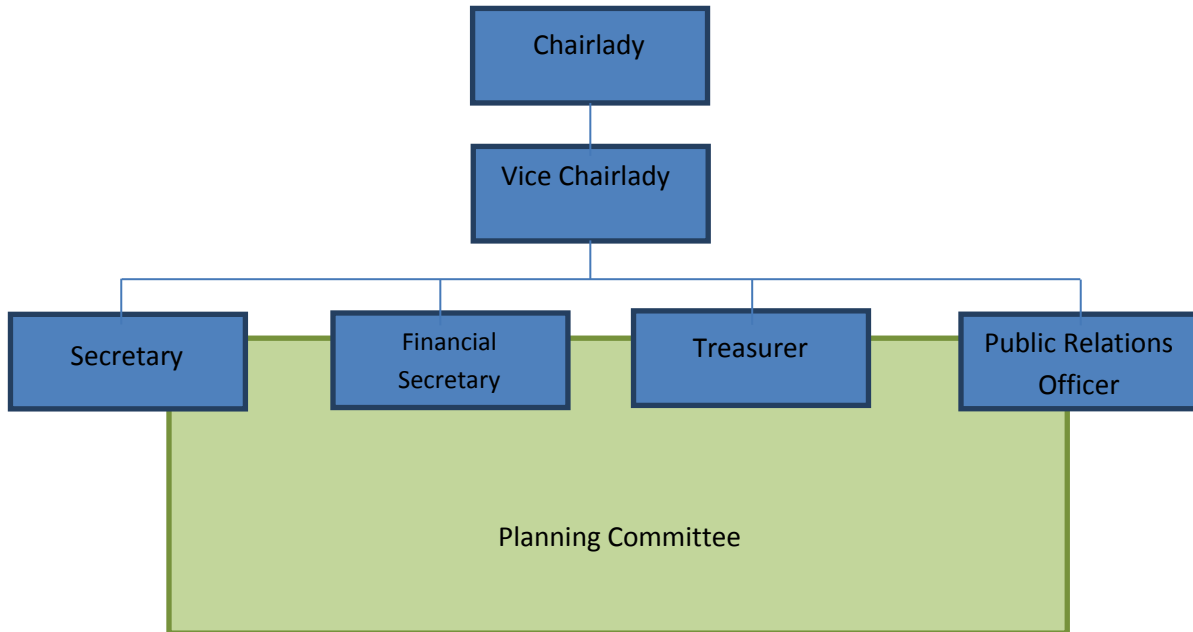
Thank you

Appendix C – Organizational Charts

Liberia National Police Women's Association



**The Sierra Leone Police Female Staff Association
(National Executive)**



Ghana Police Service's Police Ladies Association

