

POLICY BRIEF

Police Reform in an Independent South Sudan

A recent poll found that 79 percent of South Sudanese ranked improving security as a very high priority for the government, second only to providing more access to health care, which 82 percent prioritized.¹ While unsurprising, these results reflect the continuing sense that more than seven years after the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement with Sudan and many months after gaining independence in July 2011, South Sudan has yet to realize key aspects of its peace dividend, particularly in the security sector. One component to restoring security across the new state is a functioning and effective police service that respects human rights and upholds the rule of law. Ongoing reform of the South Sudan Police Service (SSPS) is contributing to making South Sudan a safer, more secure environment for its population, but many challenges face the fledgling service.

Notwithstanding Interior Minister Alison Manani Magaya's announcement in September 2011 that one of his priorities would be to reform the SSPS and despite the adoption of a reform plan, real and widespread changes are unlikely to be visible for some time. This is largely because of the number of police officers involved and time it will take to address chronic problems such as illiteracy, cattle raiding, and unprofessional behaviour like public drunkenness and civilian abuse. Crucially, it is these issues which contribute to the sense of insecurity felt by many South Sudanese.

As South Sudan consolidates its independence and continues to address its security challenges in part through reform of the SSPS, the government's main challenges to creating the rights-respecting police service it hopes for are education and training of police personnel,

¹ International Republican Institute and Pechter Polls, "Survey of South Sudan Public Opinion: September 6-27, 2011," December 5, 2011, <http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2011%20December%205%20Survey%20of%20South%20Sudan%20Public%20Opinion%2C%20September%206-27%2C%202011.pdf>, 19.

As South Sudan consolidates its independence, this policy brief analyzes the challenges facing the South Sudan Police Service's ongoing reform efforts.

Voters turn out in large numbers in Juba, capital of South Sudan, on the first day of polling in the South's long-awaited self-determination referendum



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securing adequate resources for the service, and vetting of existing staff and new recruits. The SSPS also faces specific challenges related to women, both within its ranks and in the communities it serves.

Education and training

Approximately 80 percent of SSPS personnel are functionally illiterate.² Without basic literacy skills, most police officers are not able to adequately perform their duties or fully benefit from the training that is provided. Tasks such as note-taking and writing reports of cases are impossible without the ability to read and write. The SSPS is addressing this problem, but teaching upwards of 25,000 individuals will take time.

Relatedly, training officers with an emphasis on police skills that are respectful of basic human rights is also an ongoing challenge. The SSPS is addressing the fact that many of its members have little or no formal education by retiring elderly officers and the illiterate that it inherited from the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and by focusing recruitment on youth with at least secondary education. Notably, many of the available advanced training sessions are provided by aid donors and focus on their priorities, such as protection of very important people and special weapons and tactics. Community-level conflict mediation skills and courses in safely directing traffic would be much more valuable to the vast majority of police officers.

Conditions faced by new recruits at police training facilities remain a cause for concern. In 2011, the lack of infrastructure at a newly established training centre in Rejaf contributed to outbreaks of dysentery and malaria and the deaths of as many as 100 recruits. Worse still, the treatment of recruits by senior officers led to allegations of sexual abuse and torture.³ While the SSPS has made statements about addressing these incidents and regularly calls on police personnel to uphold the principles set



Photo: Stein Ove Korneliusen

Policemen in Juba, South Sudan

out in the national constitution, attitudes which permit such abuses permeate all levels of the police service and will take time and concerted effort to change.

Addressing Human Rights Violations

Human rights abuses such as those alleged to have happened at the Rejaf training centre are not limited to new police recruits. Reports of SSPS personnel abusing civilians, foreign nationals, and international organization staff members are all too common and point to the need for a formal vetting process within the police service.

Such a process would necessarily involve identifying those members of the police accused of human rights abuses, including during wartime, investigating allegations, and taking appropriate action to remove suspects from active duty until their cases can be processed by the judicial system. Certainly, this is no small task for a police service that has been trying to increase recruitment to better serve a vast, difficult territory and for a judicial system that faces numerous challenges of its own. Given this situation and the understandable attachment South Sudan's political elite feels toward those who served in the SPLA and are now part of the SSPS, there does not seem to be an appetite within the government to introduce a comprehensive vetting program.

Recent moves to retire aged staff and develop a community policing model are positive steps that improve the professionalism of the police. Working more directly with community members should

2 Sudan Catholic Radio Network, "High Illiteracy Limits UN Trainings of South Sudan Police," October 3, 2011, http://sudancatholicradio.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5003:high-illiteracy-limits-un-trainings-of-south-sudan-police&catid=2:south-sudan&Itemid=84.

3 Josh Kron, "Recruits for Police in Sudan are Abused," *New York Times*, Feb 24, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/25/world/africa/25sudan.html?pagewanted=all>.

help individual police officers connect with them and the SSPS as a whole to better understand and respond to community needs while at the same time respecting human rights.

A Paucity of Resources

Resource constraints, both human and financial, are at the crux of the failure to address many of the issues with police performance. Over the past couple of years, the SSPS has been working to boost its membership so that it can effectively patrol South Sudan. While ranks have grown, minimal and unreliable pay and benefits have posed challenges to both recruitment and motivating professional behaviour. The government recently increased police salaries despite its intent to limit spending as oil revenues decrease because of a dispute with Sudan.⁴ It remains to be seen whether newly augmented salaries will be paid, but the raise represents an encouraging recognition of the need to pay police officers a living wage.

A lack of physical resources has also been an impediment to improving police performance. But with the establishment of a new police academy, donor support for improved radio communications equipment, and investment in new vehicles, the SSPS should be able to mitigate some of the obstacles to successful policing of much of South Sudan. That said, the needs of this still-fledgling police service are so great that even generous investments in infrastructure and technologies are unlikely to catalyze wholesale change across the country.

Women and the Police

Women in communities share with men similar challenges in most of their interactions with the police. Unlike men, however, women face specific challenges related to their social status and roles in South Sudanese society. For example, from time to time young women in Juba are harassed by SSPS officers who object to the clothing that they choose to wear. Female survivors of domestic violence note that they are reluctant

Female police officers face the same literacy, education, and training challenges as their male counterparts, but also face gender discrimination.



UN Photo/Olivier Chassot

Recruits for the South Sudan Police Service (SSPS) assemble at the John Gurang Unified Memorial Police Training Academy in Rajaf, South Sudan.

to lodge complaints with the police because they expect to be rebuffed. As one report notes, “‘They will just laugh at you and tell you to go home,’ was a common refrain [among women].”⁵

The experiences of female police officers are often analogous. They face the same literacy, education, and training challenges as their male counterparts, but also face gender discrimination. While there is a surprising number of female police officers in the SSPS—unconfirmed official estimates suggest about 25 percent of the force is female,⁶ which is largely because of their presence in the SPLA and subsequent transfer—their potential to contribute to improving the police service is being overlooked since they are often relegated to administrative roles, sewing, and making tea. Still, with donor support, a small number of ambitious policewomen are pushing forward in establishing a female police staff association which should help them speak with one voice and advocate for improved working conditions and a more gender-sensitive approach to policing.

⁴ “South Sudan Police Given Rise Despite Austerity Measures,” *Sudan Tribune*, Feb 26, 2012, <http://www.sudantribune.com/South-Sudan-police-given-rise,41723>.

⁵ Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment, “Women’s Security in South Sudan: Threats in the Home,” January 2012, <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/pdfs/facts-figures/women-security/HSBA-threats-in-the-Home.pdf>, 6.

⁶ Victoria Matatio Elia Guli and Jennifer Erin Salahub, “Women’s Perspectives on the Reform of the Southern Sudan Police Service” in *African Women on the Thin Blue Line: Gender-Sensitive Police Reform in Liberia and Southern Sudan*, ed. Jennifer Erin Salahub (Ottawa: North-South Institute, 2011), 46.

A new police reform plan has been adopted and is slowly being implemented.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In many ways, an independent South Sudan faces many of the same challenges to police reform that it did before independence. The SSPS competes with numerous other priorities for a share of scarce resources. The vast majority of police officers are illiterate. Police training is often supply-driven by donors, rather than based on what would be most helpful to the SSPS. Many of the same sources of insecurity endure, particularly cattle raiding, small arms proliferation, and the looming threat of Sudan, to name a few.

Yet, in some key ways, the context has changed. South Sudan is now an independent country able to negotiate autonomously with donors, a situation which should provide it with more leverage than before. A new police reform plan has been adopted and is slowly being implemented. The SSPS has grown over the past 18 months thanks in part to donor support for recruitment and training and there have been some advances in procurement and infrastructure and technology investment. Nevertheless, the SSPS remains poorly equipped and insufficiently trained to respond quickly and effectively to incidents such as communal violence, let alone to work with communities to prevent these clashes.

Perhaps the greatest challenge that the SSPS faces is the urgency with which all of these issues must be addressed. Some reforms will necessarily take time to fully implement because they require changes in attitudes, culture, and patterns of behaviour. As part of ongoing processes and in order to improve police performance and respond to enduring and new challenges, the Government of South Sudan and the SSPS should consider:

- working closely with donors to secure long-term, needs-based, and demand-led investment in training, infrastructure, and equipment for the SSPS;
- implementing a comprehensive program to vet existing staff and new recruits for their involvement in human rights abuses during and since the civil war;
- supporting the development of a female police staff association and working with policewomen to improve their working conditions;
- taking a broad, participatory, and consultative approach to implementing the new community policing strategy; and
- fully implementing the new police reform plan in a meaningful way.

South Sudan's partners in development should continue to support the new country in its efforts. Donors should provide predictable technical and financial support that responds to the priorities of the Government of South Sudan and the fundamental needs of the SSPS. 🌐

This policy brief draws on the work of NSI's Fragile and Conflict-Affected States program. For more information, about the program, please visit: http://www.nsi-ins.ca/catalog/Fragile_and_conflict_affected_states-72-1.html



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