A policing partnership for post-war Africa? Lessons from Liberia and southern Sudan

Bruce Baker*

African Studies Centre, Coventry University, Coventry, UK

(Received 4 December 2008; final version received 2 March 2009)

The paper examines partnerships between the police and local groups engaged in policing in two fragile African states – southern Sudan and Liberia. There is a tendency in Africa for such partnerships to function as local policing activities assisted by the police. This is in contrast to the model more familiar in the West, where partnerships tend to function as the police assisted by local policing activities. The article evaluates two examples of the African alternative model. First, a long-standing partnership in southern Sudan where policing is provided by customary chiefs. Second, one that is emerging in Liberia in the wake of the failure of a partnership based on community police forums. The relative success of the first model and the relative failure of the second model and its replacement by the first, raise the question of what constitutes a suitable and sustainable policing partnership in a fragile state.

Keywords: partnerships; local policing groups; southern Sudan; Liberia

This paper examines partnerships between the police and local groups engaged in policing in the context of fragile states in Africa. Whether such partnerships have a long history or are recent innovations initiated by the police, there is a tendency for the partnerships in Africa to function as local policing activities assisted (or at least condoned and used periodically) by the police. This is in contrast to the model more familiar in the West, where partnerships tend to function as the police assisted by local policing activities. This article takes two examples of the alternative African model: one a long-standing partnership with policing provided by customary chiefs; and one that is emerging in the wake of the failure of a partnership modelled on community police forums. The relative success of the African model in the first example and the relative failure of the Western model and its replacement by the African model in the second example, raise the question of what constitutes a suitable and sustainable policing partnership in a fragile state.

Partnership in the West is often conceived in terms of the concept of community policing, this being understood as both a mind-set and an organisational strategy that brings the police and a so-called community together so as to solve problems of crime, disorder and safety within the locality. It is a policy, however, that is explicitly about enhancing state policing, done through what Friedmann calls ‘a proactive reliance on community resources that seeks to change crime causing conditions. This assumes a need for greater accountability of police, greater public share in decision-making and the fostering of a higher standard of law enforcement.

*Email: Bruce.Baker@coventry.ac.uk

ISSN 1043-9463 print/ISSN 1477-2728 online
© 2009 Taylor & Francis
DOI: 10.1080/10439460902871330
http://www.informaworld.com
making, and greater concern for civil rights and liberties’ (Friedmann 1992, p. 4). The distinctive element is its focus on crime producing conditions as the likely potential source for reducing crime. It is for this reason that the approach urges the police to turn to the local people and groups to understand their needs and to avail itself of their local knowledge.

Such community policing (or ‘policing with the community’) may well bring the police into increased contact with the public in forums, but a different emphasis is found in many parts of Africa. The focus of what might be called the alternative African model is not on local groups assisting the police to do a better job. Instead, the focus is on (or shifts to) local groups doing much of the everyday policing with the assistance or at least the consent of the police. To many in developed countries at peace, such a partnership smacks of ‘vigilantism’ and of people ‘taking the law into their own hands’. For example, the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland insists that community policing is about the police ‘participating in the community and responding to the needs of that community, and the community participating in its own policing and supporting the police. What we emphatically do not mean … is vigilante groups policing neighbourhoods’ (The Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland 1999, p. 40). It is a reservation based, of course, on the widespread premise that it is the state alone that holds the monopoly of the use of legitimate force and that any other actors in the field of policing must be under their control and authority.

The question arises, however, as to whether the same strong reservations are as relevant in fragile African states, possibly coming out of war, where the ability of the state to provide essential public services is much more constrained. Might it be that, contrary to donor attempts to introduce into Africa a partnership where local activity assists the police, a partnership of the police assisting or co-operating with local policing activity is a more practical and sustainable approach to providing protection from and response to crime? No one believes that such a partnership between the police and local security actors offers any easy answers to the problems of fragile and post-conflict societies. There are very clear risks. Yet there may also be opportunities that the state police can seize if they utilise the policing capacities of local groups. To unravel some of the main elements in the debate, this paper will take two contrasting partnership examples from African post-conflict states – Liberia and southern Sudan. In one, the African alternative model has long prevailed; in the other, it emerged (or re-emerged) only as the newly introduced Western model began to fail. After a brief introduction to the circumstances of post-war Liberia and southern Sudan, the paper will assess the two countries’ post-war police agencies deficits in terms of capacity and legitimacy. This will be followed by an evaluation of the two partnerships’ examples and an assessment of their suitability to post-conflict Africa. For all their differences, the two examples highlight both the benefits and difficulties of such a partnership. They leave unresolved the key question of whether such a partnership is a wise or dangerous path to take in the context of African fragile states.

The article is based on a wider research programme conducted in Liberia and southern Sudan in 2007 that used semi-structured interviews, focus groups, workshops and observation, to explore the experience of individuals concerning policing by state police and local groups. In each country more than 200 individuals of both genders were interviewed singly and in groups in both urban and rural settings. In
addition, key figures who authorised and provided policing and other professionals with insights into policing and crime (government administration, commercial, jurists, human rights organisations, donors) were selected. Together the interviews provided an overview of how policing providers and users viewed both local policing provision and the link between them and the police.

Post-war Liberia and southern Sudan

Internal war devastates lives, the economy, state structures, the physical fabric and social cohesion. Liberia and southern Sudan were no exception. War lasted some 14 years for the people of Liberia. Despite the military intervention of Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to check the civil war that had begun in 1989 and the presidential elections in 1997 that installed Charles Taylor, hostilities quickly broke out again. Rebel groups such as Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) took over large parts of the country. Only the forced departure of President Taylor to Nigeria in 2003 made possible a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

To support the peace process, the UN organised the UN Mission to Liberia (UNMIL). Its objectives were, inter alia, to assist the transitional government in re-establishing national authority throughout the country and in preparing for national elections. The government, however, was hindered by corruption and a lack of authority in much of the country. Regarding security, senior positions in the security agencies were distributed among the former rebel officers irrespective of merit, and the officers’ former units were absorbed into their agencies without any professional training. Matters did improve following the election in November 2005 of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. Nevertheless, her administration is faced with a need for a large scale reconstruction of all services and infrastructure, and yet has few qualified personnel to manage governmental operations and faces severe financial constraints.

Sudan’s own CPA was reached just two years later than Liberia’s, in 2005. It brought to an end the southern insurgency that had been running since 1983. The CPA formed an interim Government of National Unity, with the possibility of the secession of southern Sudan, subject to a referendum to be held in 2011. The CPA established a separate Government of Southern Sudan with its own constitution and ministries. In practice, however, the CPA has not been fully implemented with, for instance, the border through the oil fields yet to be determined. Many fear renewed conflict after the anticipated vote for secession of 2011. Not surprisingly, given the intensity and duration of the civil war, the southern Sudan government has been overwhelmed by the task of constructing state institutions. Its control over its territory is imperfect and remains, in places, contested by armed groups. Poor transport and communications networks curtail the government’s ability to project its authority. Like Liberia, managerial systems and procedures are not in place; nor are there the skilled personnel to operate them; and even the necessary capital infrastructure is often non-existent.

For Liberia and southern Sudan, therefore, policing is a priority. Both governments have stated that substantial restructuring of policing organisation and practice is essential. The post-war challenge for state building in the two
countries is not just one of restoring state structures, but rather of establishing a new state system following minimal provision of the previous authoritarian regimes.

**Post-war police deficits**

An evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of locally based policing necessitates a look at the state police they contrast themselves with. The police in post-war Liberia and southern Sudan were both faced with capacity and legitimacy deficits such that in some circles of government there has been a willingness to consider police partnerships that link the police with local policing provision.

**Capacity deficits**

By the end of the war, the security infrastructure of Liberia was largely destroyed and many personnel had either departed or had been compromised in terms of human rights abuses. According to the Head of Operations, United Nations Police (UNPOL), in 2003 when UNPOL arrived:

> There were very few officers left in the Liberia National Police; in Monrovia (capital of Liberia) just a few. Most of the (police) depots were abandoned, and in Buchanan and Gbamga they were managed by the rebels groups. We had then an Expansion Unit to try to locate LNP (Liberia National Police) officers ... it was very hard to find suitable people.¹

Of those officers remaining or located, ‘70 per cent had not received police training’ and after removing unsuitable officers (those over 55 years; who had been in the service more than 25 years; who lacked the appropriate education; and who had unacceptable human rights record) ‘it left us with 786 police’ said the UNPOL Head of Reform and Reconstruction.² The lack of human capacity was matched by a lack of financial resources. The Liberian budget of 2006–2007 allocated US$7.5m (5.8% of the total) to the security forces, of which the police were only a minor beneficiary compared with the army (Africa Research Bulletin 2006, 17044A). The police agencies are so underfunded that only 3500 can be employed in the Liberia National Police (LNP) and are paid only US$90 per month. Interviews with seven LNP Chief Superintendents, both in Monrovia and across the country, highlighted a lack or absence of: vehicles to respond to calls; petrol for vehicles; radios for police officers; electricity in police stations; torches for night patrol; batons; uniforms; and handcuffs. For four heads of CIDs interviewed in towns outside of Monrovia, no vehicles meant: ‘Sometimes we have to walk two or three days to the crime scene. We have to get a taxi or an organization to help or UNMIL.’³ For the head of the single forensic laboratory, it meant few fingerprint kits; an empty chemistry laboratory; a photographic section that had one digital camera, but no working computer; no crime scene van; and no specialists – whether pathologists, toxicologists, ballistics specialists, fingerprint specialists or forgery experts. He reflected that: ‘In 1989 60 per cent of the staff were graduates; but war came and we lost all these people and the lab was looted. All is a zero point’.⁴

This limited capacity of personnel and resources was further exacerbated by being stretched over at least 10 internal security agencies. The Commandant of the National Police Training Academy speaks of the ‘dangerous legacy’ of fragmented
security structures, where internal security agencies are ‘rivals, with competing and conflicting demands and loyalties within the state’. The Liberian state, then, was not well equipped to offer policing to all its three million inhabitants following the war.

Capacity was no better after southern Sudan’s war. During the war, the northern regime dismissed large numbers of police in the south. The severity of the war meant that outside the garrison towns the state police virtually ceased to function. And even though after the war many Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) fighters were incorporated into the police, there has still been a severe shortage of qualified senior police personnel. Furthermore, because most people in southern Sudan, as in Liberia, live in rural areas, the small urban-based police are not readily accessible and they themselves have only ever possessed a very small vehicle fleet.

The southern Sudan government’s public finances are just as severely restricted as Liberia’s. This is not just because of the natural poverty and war damage, but because oil revenues (90% of the government’s income) have turned out to be significantly lower than anticipated. It makes developing a state police system over such a large area virtually impossible. The 2007 estimated budget of the southern Sudan Police Service (SSPS) is approximately $50 million, yet salaries for the 20,000 strong service (some say 10,000 – the uncertainty is because no functional registry or police identification system exist) consume nearly 88%. Operating and capital costs are both projected to be 6%, with only 1% allocated for fuel and vehicle maintenance, severely restricting the police. Such financial constraints mean the police are undertrained and underequipped. There is little chance of them offering much more than an archipelago-type policing based in the former ‘garrison towns’, leaving most with no contact with the state police.

Besides financial constraints there is an absence of skills. Summarising the condition of the SSPS, the acting Commissioner of Yei County observed that:

Our biggest problem now is the police. They are not able to pick up their job: not able to impose law and local orders. Not competent... We need police discipline. They don’t know the role of the Commissioner... They don’t know what they are doing. If the population wants to pursue a case, they prefer to go to the military police, even if it is a civilian case... It takes hours to get a response (from police) if you live on the outskirts. There are not enough officers to provide justice. The police lack equipment and mobility.

Southern Sudan, then, is no more in a position to offer everyday policing to all its population of 31 million than Liberia. Both countries suffer from severe logistical and financial constraints. Yet there is another serious handicap – the lack of police legitimacy, after years of brutal, corrupt, incompetent and partisan performance.

**Legitimacy deficits**

Even before Liberia’s war, the police and other security agencies had long been undermined by politicisation, inefficiency and an impunity that allowed widespread human rights violations. During the course of the war agencies became partisan and abusive and were filled with personnel who had no qualification other than loyalty to their faction leader. Current police officers look back and recall: ‘Before the war we sat in offices waiting for complaints to be brought to us’; ‘When the war came we were not doing the right things. I was not doing the right thing’. And many citizens remember that: ‘They used to harass you and force you’; ‘before the war there was no
respect for the police'. Today senior management remain political appointees. And the (inadequate) post-war vetting and training process has done little to change their popular perception. In 2007, I was told by the chairperson of a non-government organisation (NGO): ‘they are not intelligent, polite; they don’t give information. They don’t do anything about the case when you take it to them’. Likewise in southern Sudan, when people have had contact with the state police, it has often been an experience of injustice, indifference and demands for bribes. And they remember that during the war security agencies were given arbitrary powers of arrest and detention. The near universal opinion of interviewees in the towns of Malakal, Juba and Yei is that the police are still unresponsive and predatory. I was told: ‘the police patrols take women at night in some parts of the market – take money and sexually harass them. When one tries to call the police for help, they don’t come’; ‘the police do not patrol here. They remain on the main road. The police do not solve our problems according to how they need to be’; ‘the police are not good. When they come to arrest, they cane people’; ‘the police beat people. They are mostly ex-soldiers. They have the same mentality – brutality’; ‘they are not really fair. If some thieves break through the roof of the shop and steal and you go to the police, they ask for money’; ‘We don’t take problems to the police. We don’t trust the police. If you try to go to the police concerning a robbery, they say they have no paper to put down their problems’; ‘if the police are not given money, there is no fairness … Before they follow procedure and analyse the case, they look for money’; ‘they demand separate fees to come to the scene of an alleged crime, to open the file, to investigate the case, and remand a suspect into custody’. There is a problem, therefore, in both countries of a legitimacy deficit in the sense that many citizens do not believe that their state police have the moral authority to enforce laws given their procedural unfairness and general ineffectiveness. They view their conduct as unacceptable within the law. This lack of legitimacy of the two forces is something that is as much a challenge as the lack of capacity. It raises the question as to whether the state can (and wants to) provide an efficient and equitable policing; can co-ordinate all its security agencies; and can ensure human rights standards in all its security agencies. It is against this background that the argument has been put forward in these two countries and elsewhere, not for partnerships where local groups assist the police, but where the police assist or at least permit and use where necessary local policing groups. Such an alternative policing partnership, it has been argued, might provide an opportunity for local people to supplement a small police force that has only limited local support and knowledge and thus improve the effectiveness of crime control and crime resolution. In addition, partnership might bring needed expertise and specialist resources to local policing groups. In the course of mutual knowledge transfer, opportunities might be opened for increasing mutual respect and understanding, and for the development of an effective national policing network.

In this vein, the UK government’s Department for International Development (DfID) argues that local policing groups (‘non-state justice and security systems’) should be engaged with. It gives as its reasons that they are widely used in rural and poor urban areas, where there is often minimal access to formal state justice; and that since having in all likelihood operated throughout the conflict period, they can play a ‘critical role’ in restoring security in the post-conflict environment. Therefore, while acknowledging the problems associated with them, it urges building ‘on the
strengths of the systems’ whilst addressing ‘those aspects that have a negative effect on poor people’s safety and access to justice’ (DfID 2004, pp. 3–4). The engagement it envisages is not just monitoring, regulation and incorporation, but ‘collaboration – the state may assist or work with non-state justice and security systems’ (DfID 2004).

Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) Handbook on Security System Reform (SSR):

SSR (Security System Reform) objectives need to focus on the ultimate outcomes of basic security and justice services. Evidence suggesting that in sub-Saharan Africa at least 80% of justice services are delivered by non-state providers should guide donors, encouraging them to take a balanced approach to supporting state and non-state provision, while understanding and respecting the context in which these services are being supplied. In such contexts, programmes that are locked into either state or non-state institutions, one to the exclusion of the other, are unlikely to be effective. (OECD/DAC 2007, p. 17)

For their part, Finnegan et al. (2008, p. 5) advocate a partnership that, inter alia, ‘maximises resources within the community through shared responsibility and joint efforts’. And Schärf (2003) positively enthuses:

The celebration of the rich diversity of non-state justice and security systems should be the policy that is adopted and promoted, as long as they fall within constitutional limits. There might have to be some monitoring and training, which should be conducted in the spirit of positive development as opposed to curtailment and control. Local government and the security agencies should become involved in the non-state ordering initiatives by supporting them in ways which are not too resource intensive.

Yet the policy is by no means current orthodoxy. As Groenewald and Peake (2004, p. 3) point out:

Reform to the police alone is insufficient; community support and assistance are also necessary to achieving the basic goals of the police . . . Building partnerships between the police and communities is a major challenge that confronts aspirant reformers, but thus far, international reform efforts have given little recognition to this challenge – not one of the mandates for UN missions mentions engagement with local communities as a reform priority.

Though the debate continues, partnership along the lines of police assistance for and recognition of local policing is a policy that is being tentatively pursued in both Liberia and southern Sudan, although in each case the envisioned partners are very different and provide very different benefits and hazards.

Partnership between unequals is always problematic. From the state’s perspective, unless the police are the dominant partner, as in the Western model of ‘community policing’, there is anxiety in conceding a role in policing for local partners, especially informal ones, in a sector that the state has traditionally claimed as its own. For the police themselves, the issue is to what degree they can or want to link up with ‘non-professionals’ and will the partnership ensure what they see as their rightful dominance in the field of security. Human rights groups may have serious concerns about any official recognition of local partners whose practices are flawed (though of course they also have to recognise that this is a problem within the state police as well). From the citizens’ point of view, the concern may be the very opposite; namely, should local groups have links with a proven brutal and predatory organisation like the state police and with one which may hold very different definitions of crime from
those held locally? And for all sides, accountability is always an issue with partnership – determining who is to hold both sides to account and how.

Partnership can be expressed in many different relationships, some less equal than others (e.g., information inclusion; practical assistance; collaboration; sponsorship; incorporation) and no two local groups or police services are the same. However, I am going to look at two specific cases, where the relationship between police and local policing groups is one of recognition and assistance by the police of the local group to undertake everyday policing in their neighbourhood. In southern Sudan, this alternative African model is a long-standing partnership; in Liberia, it is emerging in the light of the failure of a partnership where local policing groups were called upon to support the police. Both will be examined for their risks and opportunities.

**Policing partnership in southern Sudan**

In the case of the link between the police and the customary chiefs in southern Sudan, the government has made a verbal commitment to partnership, but it has not yet worked out its official policy on how to apply this. Section 174 of the interim Constitution states that: ‘The institution, status and role of traditional authority, according to customary law, are recognised by this Constitution . . . the courts shall apply customary law subject to this Constitution and law’. While policy is being formulated, individual police officers and customary chiefs have adopted (condoned by government) *ad hoc* partnerships. It should also be noted that there is, in theory, an appeal process from customary courts to statutory courts, but in practice this is rarely used.

Many fear that state partnerships that enrol and assist customary policing systems could nurture autonomous systems that in time undermine the state. This fear looks less likely when it is considered that in fact customary policing systems are often linked already (formally and informally) with the state police. It is common for activities and information to be shared or for state police functions to be delegated (officially or unofficially) to customary policing actors. It could be argued that actually such links benefit the state by strengthening state–society links and improve the state police by making them more aware of local needs of the population and more appreciated by them. Certainly in the case of southern Sudan the links have a long history. The local (customary) policing and justice networks have never been autonomous entities, but have long had strong links with the state. For instance, local justice networks act with state authority when they issue warrants, which, if not answered, entitle the customary court to imprison the non-responsive recipient in a state prison. It is also not uncommon in the towns of Malakal, Juba and Yei for a state magistrate’s court to refer a case to a customary court. Sometimes a customary court’s activities are strictly speaking illegal, as when they act outside their mandates and jurisdiction, but this often happens with the full consent of the state judicial system, the accused, and the victim. Links also exist between the customary structures and the police. The police often seek the assistance of the customary chiefs when attempting to find a person; routinely testify in customary courts; frequently act as prosecutors in customary courts after bringing the case to them; serve in uniform and in official capacities in the customary court house to maintain order.
and decorum; and often carry out a sentence of the court by ‘whipping’ the convicted individual (though they may be ‘off duty’ at the time).

Partnerships where the contribution of the local actor is dependent on voluntary labour is said by some to make it unreliable and in the long-term unsustainable, but customary chiefdoms in southern Sudan are no temporary structure. Chiefs have a very long history of service to their localities and know that their support relies to a large degree on their contribution to their neighbourhoods.

A more pertinent concern regarding police partnerships with customary chiefs is the risk that there can be no guarantee that chiefs will attain or maintain standards of conduct acceptable to the state. The dilemma for states such as southern Sudan is that if the standard for chiefs is set too high, it makes the policy of a policing partnership with them unworkable. Furthermore, high requirements would also be inconsistent, for it would overlook the manifest problems that most state police forces have. Perhaps the issue is more whether an imperfect chiefdom partner can be elevated to acceptable levels. The list of fears is familiar: will chiefs avoid corruption and abuse of power? Will chiefs establish suitable procedures of record keeping and handling complaints of injustice and abuse? Will chiefs increasingly eradicate discriminatory behaviour against vulnerable groups or corporal punishment? These are genuine fears, since they touch on cultural patterns that are not simply swept aside by a few training workshops. Nor is it certain that over time the changes that occur in chiefdom policing will be in a liberal direction.

Though chiefs in southern Sudan are not without problems, the extent can be exaggerated. One recent review argues that:

The possibility of blatant miscarriage of justice is obviated by the wide participation in court proceedings by ordinary villagers and the real possibility of removal of a chief seen to act contrary to acceptable and accepted standards. (Golooba-Mutebi and Mapuor 2005, pp. 18–19)

Interviews conducted in Malakal, Juba and Yei in 2007 indicated that chiefs provided what was deemed by most to be a just, fair and effective policing service (Baker and Scheye, forthcoming). One women’s leader argued, ‘If they were not just, there would be no peace’. However, it is apparent that not every woman feels that they are listened to appropriately in all circumstances. For example, in cases of adultery, some respondents felt insufficient weight was given to ‘justifiable’ circumstances that could serve to mitigate the offence. Customary courts are presided over and attended largely by men, though the research saw evidence of women on the judicial panels. Yet according to some respondents, those accused of adultery felt judged in advance as guilty. In contrast, it was argued that men could secure divorces on the grounds of adultery much more easily than women, especially if they argued neglect or abuse. Complaints were also heard from some widows. In the case of a widow, without grown-up male children or one who might object to being inherited by a brother-in-law, there was the danger of the court endorsing the transfer of the property of her deceased husband to members of his family. Generally, little regard is paid to how the woman will be able to raise her children, or even what is to happen to her. A group of women in Juba complained: ‘it is all about favouritism . . . they look for one who has money’, which is invariably the man. Poor women stonebreakers in Juba agreed that chiefs treat men better: ‘these things happen; they consider those with money’. Nor is it just the poor who
complain. A wealthy woman from Yei acknowledged that in chiefs’ courts, ‘corruption can intervene … Cases die a death after money is given’. Overall, however, the customary courts within the areas surveyed did not appear to have systemic problems of bias and corruption that are not also found, in equal measure, within the state system. Nevertheless, wherever discrimination is found and to whatever degree it is prevalent, it is a cause for concern if the state is to endorse a partnership between chiefs and the police. The Human Rights Commissioner in southern Sudan argued persuasively, however, that given the chiefs openness to change, it is important to work with them as they are in the present, so as to win the right to bring change in the future over the remaining issues that cause concern.

For all states contemplating partnerships that would see the police supporting local policing groups, they may expect state agency resistance. That is, state actors putting obstacles in the way of such a policy or undermining its implementation. Local and national politicians may block any attempt to put resources outside of their control and in the hands of those outside the state. Likewise, the police may resent anyone being invited into their ‘territory’, seeing themselves as the security professionals. Should partnership be forced on them, they have a multitude of ways of undermining or corrupting such a policy to suit their own agenda as a force or as individuals at the station level. Opposition, then, from vested interests may well scupper plans for partnerships that involve the police supporting local groups. In the late 1990s, there was considerable discussion within the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) leadership about how to structure and upgrade policing and justice in the future. Some proposed a mixed system of customary courts and state courts. No final decisions were made, however, as to how to proceed after a peace agreement, as the tensions and conflicts within the SPLM were unresolved. On one hand, there is the desire for the new state leaders to control the mechanisms of policing and justice; on the other, there is the sense of debt owed to customary leaders, without whom the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) could never have survived the war. Workshops were still going on in 2007 where central and local government leaders were debating who should control customary courts through centralised legislation. Meanwhile chiefs were arguing not for co-operation but independence; or rather, for maintaining accountability to their own ethnic communities so as to preserve their credibility.

Despite the difficulties of partnerships where the police assist and recognise local groups’ provision of everyday policing, they offer opportunities as well. The outstanding advantage for the police in southern Sudan is that customary policing is present in just about every neighbourhood, urban or rural. In most areas of southern Sudan the dense network of sub-headmen, headmen, sub-chiefs, chiefs and paramount chiefs dominate. Their conflict resolution and arbitration that revolves around compensation and rehabilitation are regarded by most users as effective. It is for this reason that the customary courts in southern Sudan have been called ‘the optimal way for putting in place the best performing delivery system’ (Mullen 2005, p. 2).

In addition, having local policing partners such as customary chiefs overcomes the problem of police initiatives that are ‘parachuted in’. These are prone to be resisted or not sustained (Nathan 2007). The local networks, however, are supported because they function according to the cultural values of most of the local participants. In the case of the customary structures of southern Sudan:
Chiefs do not preside over trials and adjudications on their own, but are assisted by panels of advisors and lay members of the public. The variety of participants means that verdicts are not seen as those of the chief alone but in a sense, those of the community. This suggests that judgments are fair and just. During interviews, almost all respondents, young and old, women and men, were unanimous in the view that judgments passed in chiefs’ courts are generally fair and just. (Golooba-Mutebi and Mapuor 2005, p. 18)

Being rooted in prevailing local values, local partners such as chiefs can offer local agents to the police who are more adaptable to the changing needs of the local populace and stay in place during national crises and conflicts. Above all, such partnerships enable the police to draw on local knowledge and co-operation so that crime is successfully prevented or investigated. Hence, from a fragile state’s point of view, a policing system that is in place in every community, is effective, well supported and costs very little money is of great attraction as a partner to its police.

Policing partnerships in Liberia

In post-war Liberia an attempt has been made to establish a new policing partnership; one based not on the familiar African model of the police assisting and recognising chiefs and other local groups to perform everyday policing, but of local groups assisting and recognising the police. In 2004, under external guidance, the state introduced the ‘community policing’ model. The aim was to establish ‘Community Forums’ across the country and in all the seven police zones in Monrovia, with sub-forums based around the capital’s police stations. In 2007, there were said to be 51 Forums in Monrovia and 93 more in the rest of Liberia. Interestingly, some of these were previously autonomous local ‘task forces’ that were taken over as Forums in this initiative. The approach was for the police to invite local leaders to form a Forum after they had had the concept explained to them. At a subsequent public meeting leaders were elected. The Forums have met fairly regularly, with the police Commander in attendance. Essentially, the Forums have played the role of junior assistant to the police: issues have been discussed and solutions sought; intelligence has been provided to the police; in some cases patrols have been organised; and local disputes have been settled. In some very small posts they have shared the duties with the police. Said a police officer concerning the local Forum: ‘They help me a lot. I have only one shift. They stay here at night. They handle things and take statements and even hold people in detention. Even for arrest they will go along with the PPO (police probationers)’.

This Western model of policing partnership was of course designed to bring to an end, and to prevent the recurrence of, autonomous policing systems, such as the post-war task forces, that are believed in time to undermine the state. Yet the government policy of constructing such new policing partnerships has proved more difficult than expected. Firstly, it has faced the problem of sustaining volunteer enthusiasm among individuals who are not rooted in a long-standing institution such as chiefdoms. Finnegan et al. (2008, p. 25) may be naïve to argue that for partnership with individual members of the public to be promoted:

The concept of volunteering needs to be engendered in local communities. In contrast to the past, the public should be encouraged to provide information without payment;
communities should be made to understand that the reward for providing information is a safer community.

The evidence that this is hard to sustain over time has already been provided by Rwanda and Uganda where the enthusiasm shown by the post-conflict generation to ‘rebuild’ their nation has shown signs of wilting and of not being transferred to the next generation (Baker 2005a, 2007b). In Liberia, the voluntarism that has supported the police Forums quickly came under threat from two sources: threats by criminals; and apparent lack of official support. Concerning intimidation, one Monrovian Community Police Forum chairman admitted that their patrol had been reduced from 30 members to 17, ‘owing to threats from criminals; and because people are reluctant to do things voluntarily and assume that the president is getting paid but not distributing it’. Another Monrovian chairman expressed his resentment at lack of government support:

We embrace the idea of community policing to promote justice. Since the idea was introduced into Liberia, the government has showed no appreciation. They don’t understand the language of Forums. We know their importance. The police cannot do it all. We live in the community. We’re doing the work of the police. But we have no office (they use the local council office). I use my own house. We purchase our own stationery and pay for our typing. Why was the Forum founded if the government won’t support it? . . . We just sacrifice but there is no appreciation . . . The UN brought this idea; the Bryant (transitional) government brought this idea. But to act on an idea is different.16

His words echo an executive member of a Policing Partnership Board in Freetown, Sierra Leone, who told me: ‘I am very proud of what we are doing. We will get tired eventually. But it is still close to the war’. Yet it is not just the government that are not perceived to be wholehearted about this new partnership. The Forums do not get every police commander’s full support in practice. A chairman in Monrovia spoke of ‘drug dens’ that had not been closed down by the police, even though they had been reported to them:

It is frustrating. Information is filtered down to the criminals . . . the police don’t follow up, especially CID . . . if we step up night patrols and thieves are turned over to the police but the police do not come back to inquire for more details, then there is no case to answer.18

Another chairman said: ‘It is not always easy to get the police. Sometimes it seems like a daylight operation’.19 Whilst, therefore, the police appreciate the facilitating of crime investigation and the supply of crime intelligence by the Forums, there is little practical contribution on their part to enabling the partnership. It is similar to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where commanders viewed joint patrols with Partnership Boards as ‘unhelpful’ (Baker 2007a).

A long-term strategy of using volunteers from the public almost inevitably raises the thorny question of ‘incentives’, financial or otherwise. When most of the energy for a partnership that was initiated as one of mutual effort is being supplied by one side, there is a danger that voluntarism might run its course. Clearly, fear and disillusionment have eroded voluntary efforts in Liberia. In this respect chiefs make more reliable partners, even though they complain about the smallness of the government remuneration.

As in southern Sudan, there has also been the issue in Liberia of seeking to guarantee that local policing groups will attain or maintain standards of conduct
acceptable to the state. It was on this basis that the post-war anti-crime groups in Liberia, though they offered help to a clearly over-stretched police, were transformed into Community Forums or closed down. It was thought that their tradition of violence was not one that could be easily removed. And some Forums on Monrovia have moved beyond their remit into running Neighbourhood Watches that operate nightly patrols.

It is, however, the weight of the rapidly rising post-war crime rate that has primarily caused the wilting of the model that the police should be the primary provider of policing and that other local actors should only have the role of supporting them to do the work. In 2006 Liberia’s Minister of Justice spoke of ‘police inability to decisively deal with this upsurge in criminal activities’ (Rennie 2006). The 3500 officers largely based in Monrovia and the main towns were unable to cope, even with the assistance of intelligence provided by the Police Forums. She therefore reverted to the older model of partnership and asked ‘community dwellers to organize themselves into vigilante groups’ (Rennie 2006). As a result local groups of young men in Monrovia registered with the police and began night patrols armed with ‘rubber guns’ (catapults).

Although Police Forums were not abandoned, this step was a clear recognition that they were not the solution originally imagined. Yet the reversal to emphasising local policing groups as the deliverers of everyday urban policing with the assistance and recognition of the police did not however go unchallenged. The Minister came under considerable pressure from Human Rights groups, international aid agencies, the UN and the LNP. The UNPOL head of reform and reconstruction in Liberia captured the tensions: ‘community policing develops partnership and support from citizens. And it helps the police with intelligence if there are night patrols or neighbourhood watches, though we try to discourage vigilante groups’.20 The LNP also made clear that they had concerns about local anti-crime groups doing everyday policing. A commander from Monrovia told me: ‘People always like to take the law into their own hands. The UN emphasises human rights, but people want to see quick results and tend towards mob justice’.21 In other words, the Liberian police were not comfortable assisting local groups to do the everyday policing, even though they did not have the resources themselves to fulfil the task. It may be that as in Sudan, creating new partnerships is more problematic for them than strengthening existing partnerships.

As a result, the Minister did a u-turn and issued a statement in 2007 that she had been misunderstood, and that she had meant to convey that groups should work alongside the police. Consequently, the police closed down all such groups just one year after they had formed. The localities in Monrovia were extremely angry and armed crime increased.

Yet the return to the new Western model of partnership once more came up against the African realities of widespread armed urban crime and a police force that was far too small even to cope with urban crime, let alone to make its presence felt in the rural areas. By 2008, increased public outcry against armed robbery led to the police, under pressure from President Johnston-Sirleaf, to consult with local leaders regarding another attempt at the African model of partnership. The outcome was that five security zones in Monrovia were established and within each have been organised ‘vigilante or watch groups’ (Analyst 2008). In other words, the police have finally agreed (or have been compelled) to support local groups to do the everyday
policing in an urban situation. What will appeal to the government is of course the low cost of extending policing through this partnership. State police systems are expensive in terms of resources, hence their smallness and concentration in urban centres. In contrast, local groups are cheap to support and offer considerable personnel resources in those locations where the police have traditionally chosen not to patrol. There are few neighbourhoods in Liberia’s towns where there are not anti-crime organisations, ‘task forces’, ‘vigilantes’ and youth groups, all acting to various degrees in a policing role. Interviews indicated that the local groups are locally supported because they both function according to the cultural values of most of the local participants and are effective. The popular contrast between local knowledge and police knowledge was brought out by a resident of Tubmanburg: ‘The police are all young boys. They think they can learn on the job. They are inexperienced. We lost the old guys (in the war). The police don’t know all the rogues here. We do; we were born here’.22

It remains to be seen how much the Liberian state can control and maintain the standards of these local groups, that is, whether it will really be a partnership with the police or a parallel, shadow policing. Particularly important will be the attitude of the police. The police were only too glad in 2007 to close down those groups in Monrovia not part of the Community Forum programme, and will be just as keen to undermine this second attempt to delegate ‘their’ work to local partners. The debate, therefore, between Western and alternative models of partnership in Liberia is not yet definitively resolved. Tension remains at the government level between what might be chosen in a strong economy and what can be achieved in a fragile state; and at the ‘street level’ tension remains between popular demands and police demands.

**Conclusion**

The Western model of policing partnerships does not root readily in the soil of post-conflict Africa. The insistence that post-war police be the principal providers of security assisted by certain prescribed citizen activities necessitates turning police–citizen relationships from hostility, based on a history of previous abuse, to mutual engagement. This transformation cannot be accomplished speedily or easily. The relationship of the partners of this model is invariably asymmetric, with citizens as the junior partner allowed to do small tasks by the professionals. The police may value the energy, activity and intelligence provided by local groups, but seldom put serious effort into the partnerships themselves. The partnership is essentially instrumental; it is primarily serving a police goal rather than a neighbourhood goal. Indeed, the police are too often inclined to use them more as a tool of instruction than of listening to local concerns or as a means to enhancing their own police image rather than on crime prevention (Raleigh et al. 2000, Baker 2007a). Repeatedly, the police and local groups such as Forums have been found to be at cross purposes as regards expectations: the police seeking legitimisation and intelligence gathering and insisting on control; citizens anticipating input into and even control of the police agenda and appointments in their neighbourhoods.

Some might interpret these outcomes as a failure of implementation (Raleigh et al. 2000), but in the light of the widely reported difficulties with the introduction of community policing in South Africa (Pelser 1999, Schärf 2000, Brogden and Shearing 1993) and elsewhere (Brogden 2004) the truth may be that transferring a
Western partnership model to a fragile post-war African state is not appropriate. The model does not fully engage local neighbourhoods and in post-war countries such as Sierra Leone and Liberia has had little impact on crime prevention (Baker 2005b, forthcoming). Its inherent assumption that the police, with local help, are in a position to provide nationwide policing that meets citizens needs is contrary to the reality of their size and to the resources that the governments are in a position to provide them.

In the light of the difficulties associated with the western model of policing partnerships some African governments, such as southern Sudan and Liberia, are looking again at the potential of their already extant local policing groups that have long served communities and continue to do so in the absence and or failure of the state police (see Baker 2007c). Historically, in the great majority of circumstances, people have looked first to local providers for crime protection and crime response. Instead of marginalising or criminalising these groups when there is no ability to replace their services, fragile states have considered whether the groups can be brought into a single security network that incorporates the police and all approved local providers.

Partnership that would see government endorsement and police co-operation with local policing groups has many advantages in a post-conflict situation. First, it incorporates a policing that is accessible. For the most part, local policing is within walking distance, whereas the nearest police station or police post may be a mini-bus drive to the nearest town or a cycle ride to another larger village. Second, such a partnership offers official support for a local policing that is understandable; that is, it is in the users’ own language and does not use formal legal language or formal procedures. And if, as in many local policing organisations, there is an emphasis on restoration more than apportioning blame, the proceedings do not threaten relationships which may already be under severe strain in a post-war situation. Third, partnership with local policing extends policing without large scale additional cost to the government and minimal cost to the user. Fourth, it offers the opportunity for more effective national policing, for local policing may achieve what the police may not be able to do.

Of course not all problems are solved, given the dependence on witnesses; and some groups, like women and children, may be less happy than older men at the outcomes. But by and large people turn to local policing because neighbour disputes are resolved; anti-social behaviour is restrained; homes are protected at night; and stolen goods are returned, not lost in the criminal justice system after a thief is arrested. The great advantages of all local policing are that their informant network quickly finds out the perpetrators, and that in close communities (and this applies as much to the high density urban neighbourhoods as villages) it is hard to hide one’s illicit activities.

Local policing groups may indeed share advantages that are denied the police, but state endorsement does not necessarily mean a genuine partnership with the police will occur. As I have indicated throughout the article, partnership may fall short of the police assisting local groups to do everyday policing, and may be little more than an acceptance of their existence and the occasional use of them when required. In other words, with the African alternative model of policing partnership the problem of asymmetry arises in a different form – that of local groups being largely autonomous. The question is whether local people and groups can be
encouraged to turn to the police to avail themselves of its specialist knowledge, capacities, mobility and force. A partnership that allows local policing to continue with all its advantages of ongoing local provision, but that is subject to external supervision to restrain or eradicate the defects, would be worthy of the name.

The examples of southern Sudan and Liberia demonstrate fragile African states with few resources experimenting, with some reservations and hesitancy, with African alternative models of policing partnerships. That both governments have, at least temporarily, endorsed a partnership of police assistance for local policing groups to conduct everyday policing, demonstrates they have recognised its potential benefits. That both governments have not closed the door on the Western model shows that they are aware of the difficulties of the African alternative. As the debate continues southern Sudan has left the customary chiefs for the present as the main policing providers, without formalising it in legislation. Similarly, the decision by Liberia to experiment (again) with support for local policing groups in the towns, is still presented as an emergency response to a short-term crisis and has not been consolidated as a long-term policy.

In time, they must resolve the question of whether to adopt a policy that is explicitly about enhancing the state police or one that is explicitly about enhancing local policing groups. It is likely that resource constraints alone will favour the latter. Empowering local people to undertake everyday policing does indeed involve risks. Perhaps the main risk is of autonomy and thus unaccountability. That is why a strengthened policing partnership between local policing groups and the police offers such potential. If both sides can overcome suspicions, both have much to gain from division of labour. The police can certainly gain from turning to the local people and groups to understand their needs and to avail themselves of their local knowledge and energies. And local people and groups have much to gain, both from availing themselves of police specialist knowledge and capacities and of being under a national oversight body that can call them to account for conformity to state determined standards. In a strengthened African partnership model, local policing is both empowered and freed from the worst abuses, such as its use or threats of violence, its unequal treatment and its summary justice. From the tragedy of conflict in Africa may be emerging a more practical and sustainable approach to providing protection from and response to crime than has been seen before.

Acknowledgements
The author gratefully acknowledges that the Liberia research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council-Award Reference: RES-000-23-1102.

Notes
2. Interview, Head of reform and reconstruction, UNPOL, 12 February 2007.
4. Interview with Head of LNP Forensic laboratory, Monrovia, 2 February 2007.
5. Interview, Deputy Director of Police for Training and Commandant, National Police Training Academy (NPTA), 1 February 2007.
10. Interviews with a female shop owner in Juba market; residents in a Juba suburb; a Yei teenage woman; young man in Yei; Yei storeowner; a group of Juba women; a male in Juba; taxi drivers in Malakal, June 2007.
11. All the interviews with women in southern Sudan took place in June 2007.
13. In 1995, there was a judicial conference organised by African Rights and an evaluation of the operation of the SPLM courts two years later. This led, inter alia, to the printing of the New Sudan Penal Code that had been adopted at the 1994 SPLM Convention. Yet it was never publicised or distributed outside the Nuba Mountains. (The SPLM also tried to prevent similar exercises in judicial activism in the south proper.) A police code was also drawn up, but again the SPLM blocked it. At the 1999 Kampala conference on human rights in the transition, there was a session on access to justice in southern Sudan and one proposal was for a mixed system of customary courts and state courts. Thereafter there was a tussle between the SPLM and the South Sudan Law Society as to the independence of the judiciary in the SPLM areas. This was resolved in favour of the SPLM, which retained the power to appoint all judges. See Abdelsalam and de Waal (2000), Branch and Mampilly (2004) and Rolandsen (2005).
17. Interview, 8 September 2006.
22. Interview, Vice-Chairman of Tubmanburg CPF, 26 February 2007.

References
Africa Research Bulletin, 2006. 43 (7), 17044A.


