Security Sector Reform and Peacekeeping, Liberia

Global Action conducted workshops with the Gender Unit of the Liberian National Police (LNP) and the all women UN Mission to Liberia (UNMIL) Formed Police Unit - India. These workshops sought to engage participants on their perceptions, experiences and recommendations around gender mainstreaming in the Police Sector and UN Peacekeeping Missions. The sessions provided in-depth outcomes that will be incorporated into upcoming research and publications.

UN Mission to Liberia (UNMIL) Formed Police Unit - India | March 12th, 2009

This unit consisting of 125 women is the first all female contingent deployed to the UN as part of a peacekeeping mission. The all female contingent was established in January 2007, responsibilities assigned to the female police officers include patrol duties, rapid response assignments, crowd control and riot control support to the LNP, general support to the LNP and law enforcement agencies in law enforcement activities, in addition to protection of UNMIL staff members and properties.

Global Action conducted a workshop with 25 police women from the current contingent seeking to document expectations of the mission and their mandate, their interaction with women and men in the local community, interaction with the Liberian National Police, cultural/language/social interpretations, challenges faced by encourage and sustain participation in peacekeeping.

Key outcomes from discussions included:

Background and Training:

- The majority were educated, from middle income families, and for most it is their first mission to the UN
- Recruited from the Indian Central Police Force – which is the only female battalion in India
- UN provides opportunity, prestige, a chance to serve the wider community, can impact women in wider communities and also provide financial benefits to look after their families.
- They were taken through a rigorous selection process and provided training over a six week period. Training included; information on their mandate, mission expectations and training on their daily duties.

Expectations of the mission in Liberia – purpose/goals;

- Inspire the Liberian women and assist in improving their conditions, self sufficiency and prosperity
- Undertake policing duties to tackle the high incidence of gender based violence (this crime has seen an increase rather than a decline since the war ended)
• Provide leadership and encourage more women to join the Liberian National Police (LNP). Data indicates that female enrollment into the Liberian Police has increased three fold since early 2007 when the first contingent arrived
• Interacting with local community (men and women) and exchanging ideas from both cultures was seen as an important mission goal.

Interaction with local community (women and men);

• Majority of participants perceived vast cultural differences which needed to be bridged; from recent experiences most felt that both LNP and community members were happy to interact and exchange view points
• As much of this unit was new, direct interaction to date had been minimal. Previous contingents had been involved in training and workshops with local schools. The current force commander indicated that the unit would seek to continue those workshops and undertake further leadership training with young women
• Interaction with men from the community had been limited to security sector duties and addressing local crimes eg; rape, robbery and sexual exploitation.

Security Sector duties/challenges and interaction with Liberian National Police;

• Police women from the UN mission undertook patrols with the Liberian National Police and other UNPOL (UN police) staff. They indicated that this was a good way of interacting and potentially transferring policing skills
• Night patrolling was seen as more difficult due to constant movement of people, access to crime ridden areas and difficulty in consistently ensuring safety of police women
• Security duties are currently constrained to Monrovia or county areas within a day’s journey. Participants indicated enthusiasm in expanding their geographical scope but indicated that facilities catering the needs of women police persons had not been established
• Many participants stated that large gaps existed in the professionalism, discipline, motivation and policing skills of the Liberian Police Force. The commander and policewomen are hoping in the future to undertake more training with the LNP to make them more gender sensitive and also on professional policing duties.

Constraints preventing women from becoming leaders and decision makers;

• Many field positions in the UN are ‘non –family’ positions; many find it difficult to leave behind family and young children. Close to 85% of the contingent were married with children and
stated difficulties in balancing life in the police force/in the UN with family commitments. Participants indicated that set work hours, tenure of postings, and lack of leave prevented many married women from taking UN field positions.

- Professional dissatisfaction was noted as a factor preventing women from staying in missions/in police programs in their own country. Often women are not given decision making opportunities; they feel professional dissatisfaction when male colleagues get promoted faster than themselves and into more prestigious decision-making roles
- The “pull down” syndrome was also described, where once women actually reach positions of seniority they want to be seen to be like the men and often close the door to other women.

*How to increase and sustain participation in peacekeeping operations;*

- Create an environment that includes women, namely appropriate facilities. The policewomen in the Liberian mission were provided separate housing and facilities which met their needs. However, they were concerned that this may not exist in many other mission environments
- Create some flexibility in work times to accommodate family and children
- More gender training needs to be provided to individuals across all ranks, so they are aware of how to treat and respect women
- Improvements have been made but there is much that still needs to be done – to retain current women in police force and encourage more to join.

**Recommendations:**

- UNMIL Formed Police Unit, based on their training, expertise and gender sensitivity should undertake specific training sessions with the Liberian National Police – specifically the Gender Unit and the Women and Children’s Unit.
- UNMIL Formed Police Unit should receive greater exposure to local community (women, men and youth) via trainings, workshops, school briefings to maximize position as ‘role models’ and inspire more females to join the security sector.
- DPKO should utilize the unit as a case study to encourage other troop contributing countries to increase the percentage of women participating in peacekeeping missions.
- DPKO should review the ‘non-family’ rule (for more secure missions) to encourage and sustain women within peacekeeping missions
This unit, consisting of ten policemen and women was established in July 2008, seeks to promote greater female participation with the Liberian National Police (LNP) and promote gender mainstreaming within the force. This unit combined with the Women and Children’s Unit and Community Policing Unit is slowly beginning to tackle the issues of gender based violence.

Global Action conducted a workshop with participants seeking to document motivations for joining the police force, challenges faced by women, mandate of the group, interactions with local community and UNMIL and impact of the unit. Key issues discussed included:

**Police force and opportunities for women;** benefits of further education through the police force, greater confidence and self esteem from helping other women, passionate about tackling rising rates of gender based violence and provides them with greater independence by earning an income.

**Interaction with local community;** perceived as good role models for other women in the community, mixed reaction from men in the community (more community based training was required), have conducted training on 1325/1820 with the public (just finalized a 16 day sensitization program), utilize schools and educational institutions to raise awareness on gender equality and inform women on benefits of joining the police force.

**Interaction with NGOs and UN (UNMIL, UNPOL);** there is close interaction with UNPOL gender unit (though current gender advisor’s mandate ended in Feb ‘09), initial gender training was provided by UNPOL though more is required, there was some night patrolling with the Indian Female Police Unit but this was still in its early stages and some interaction with NGOs (though still minimal).

**Challenges in attracting women;** There is still stigma associated with joining the police force, often women’s husbands/partners prevented them from joining the force and the LNP is still seen as male dominated (although close to 15% of the force are women).

**Challenges of Gender Unit;** The unit (and many other elements of the LNP) are lacking in equipment such as laptops/computers/printers to conduct the administrative part of their job and also vehicles/uniforms to conduct their patrolling duties. Many still require further gender training and general police training. Further the minimal salaries were seen to be discouraging and not providing enough financial incentive to join the force. Difficulties in accessing the 15 counties due to logistical constraints (counties have very high incidences of sexual violence).
Recommendations:

- Ensure the unit receives ongoing an adequate gender based training and also general police training
- Ensure a strong relationship is maintained between UNPOL gender advisor and the LNP gender unit- this is a key link between the UN and the LNP (from a gender perspective)
- Provide logistical and equipment support for the unit – currently they are operating with minimal technology and no policing equipment (ie; vehicles)