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## Reviewing the Justice and Security Hub Modality as Piloted in Liberia

Rory Keane

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**PRACTICE NOTE****Reviewing the Justice and Security Hub Modality as Piloted in Liberia**

Rory Keane\*

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*The views expressed in this practice note are the personal views of the author and do not represent an official position. The author has previously worked extensively on SSR issues and the roll out of the justice and security hubs in Liberia.*

**Introduction**

'The Republic of Bangui' or 'the Republic of Monrovia' are phrases we sometimes hear from practitioners to describe post conflict countries where very few services exist outside the capital city. This is especially the case for security – *the* critical public good in post conflict countries. In response to the need to bring security services closer to the citizens who often need them most, the Government of Liberia and the United Nations are piloting a new approach financed by the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) – the so-called 'Justice and Security Hubs'. If the hub concept is capable of being adapted and successful elsewhere, the United Nations will not only have added a new instrument to its peacekeeping toolkit but will also firmly demonstrate how the UN Peacebuilding Fund can in essence be catalytic in fostering long-term and comprehensive approaches to peacebuilding. This

practice note outlines the process of developing and constructing the first hub in Liberia, which is due to be partly operational by the end of 2012.

**Background**

Liberia was placed on the agenda of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)<sup>1</sup> in September 2010 following a request by the Government of Liberia. A New York-based PBC Country-Specific Configuration for Liberia was created, and a Statement of Mutual Commitments (SMC) was adopted by the Government and the PBC in November 2010. The SMC, which is in a sense a robust compact, serves as the basis for the financial allocation from the UN PBF. The SMC also acts as a foundational document and roadmap for additional resource mobilisation and advocacy by the PBC. In the case of Liberia, the SMC identifies three priorities: (i) rule of law, (ii) security sector reform (SSR) and (iii) national reconciliation. The strategic focus on SSR and rule of law is based on the fact that the UN Peacekeeping Mission in the country, known as UNMIL, will gradually reduce troop numbers between 2012 and 2015 by up to 50%.<sup>2</sup> In order to ensure that there is no security vacuum during or after this drawdown process, it is critical to build up and support Liberian security and justice services. The de-

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\* Part-time guest lecturer,  
IBB Graduate School of International Relations,  
University of Liberia,  
Sinkor, Monrovia, Liberia

velopment of justice and security hubs is put forward as a new and innovative modality of doing just that.

The centrepiece of the SMC is the development of five regional Justice and Security Hubs. The vision behind the hubs is to provide a decentralised and holistic approach to justice service delivery. The holistic approach envisions a balanced strengthening of justice and security institutions and entities, including police, the courts, state prosecution and public defenders and corrections, both in terms of capacity and infrastructure, as well as enhancing the linkages between these various different actors. In addition, the 'hub' concept prioritises the development of relationships between justice and security institutions and the communities they serve, and in this regard includes both support to civil society to extend advisory services to the community and public outreach civic education programmes. Each of these aspects is seen as a complementary component of the hubs. Each of the regional five hubs will be strategically and geopolitically situated so as to enhance justice and security throughout Liberia. Each hub will service three counties out of the country's total of 15 counties, providing more effective operational control and proximity for staff deployment, communication and service delivery.

In order to commence work on the first Justice and Security Hub, a financing proposal was developed and signed by the Government of Liberia and the UN in November 2010. The PBF finance allocated to the project was US\$4 million.<sup>3</sup> The town of Gbarnga in Bong County in central Liberia was chosen as the site for the first hub, which will serve Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties.<sup>4</sup> The project has a service component<sup>5</sup> and an infrastructure component, with UNDP and UNOPS as implementing partners respectively. As of October 2012, it is envisaged that the Gbarnga Justice and Security Hub will be partly operational before the end of the year.

## Why a Hub?

In view of Liberia coming onto the agenda of the PBC in 2010 a joint Government of Liberia-UN delegation undertook an assessment in Liberia in September 2010 to see how best to inject and catalyse a peacebuilding lens into national efforts to consolidate and maintain long-term peace and security. It was felt that the peacebuilding agenda should be strategic and by that it was meant that it should act as a midwife in the face of UNMIL transition and drawdown. By having identified a clear and important role for itself in the country, the PBC could equally show how the peacekeeping and peacebuilding agendas could be mutually beneficial. Based on this orientation, the peacebuilding assessment undertaken in September 2010 illustrated that access to justice and security services outside the capital, Monrovia, was a particular challenge that would likely become a larger challenge as UNMIL logistical support and presence on the ground further reduced as envisaged. In light of resource constraints to building security and justice capacity to provide services in every county across Liberia due the limited size of the government's own budget<sup>6</sup> and limited donor envelope, a cost-effective option was sought that would also help enhance coordination between government agencies and also build on economies of scale. It was, therefore, decided to scale up and redesign a concept that the Liberian National Police (LNP) had already included in their 2009 strategic planning document, which called for the development of LNP regional command centres. The LNP plan was to develop five regional command centres across the country that would act as forward operating bases to provide more effective LNP service delivery in surrounding towns and counties. With the hub concept, it was decided to take the LNP model and scale it up to include other security sector agencies and the justice sector. The vision suggested that by bringing justice and security services together under one roof, Liberia could improve economies of scale and institutionalize cooperation and interoperability between agencies. The hub concept also very much appealed to

the Government of Liberia, as it was trying to de-concentrate services outside of Monrovia.

Significantly and wisely, PBF support was also directly linked to the government taking full responsibility for all recurring costs and by making clear that financial support for the second hub would not be made available until such time as there is a 70% staff deployment rate in the first hub. While in some ways the hub concept is a very simple idea and really no more than common sense, it has captured the imagination of a community of practice which is in search of a service delivery model that is cost effective and can be feasibly achieved. Moreover, from the UN perspective, the hub concept puts forward a model for integrating a peacebuilding approach within a peacekeeping context and in that way can potentially help prepare Liberia to deal with the challenges posed by UNMIL transition.

### **How Will It Work?**

As referenced above the construction of the hub in Gbarnga includes barracks and offices for police and border guards, a training center, courts, a prison, a vehicle maintenance unit, dining halls etc. The hub will also include a public services office that will reach out to citizens and provide better access to information and to their rights. In addition to supporting outreach activities, finance has also been provided to support civil society organisations (CSOs) in the three counties covered by the first hub, while a communications project will also enable the justice and security actors work more effectively across the three counties. Over the coming months the Liberian government plans to deploy justice and security staff to the hub, having begun this process already. It will be important to support and evaluate the degree to which the surge in staff has the effect of increasing access to and the quality of justice and security service delivery. Appropriately, a staff deployment strategy has been put in place by the Government of Liberia and it is expected that approximately 70 officers from the Police Support Unit (PSU) will deploy on a strict

rotational basis to the hub, with some officers already in place. These officers will not replace the regular policing tasks carried out by the local police on the ground, but rather will act as a surge capacity in order to safeguard public order and the rule of law in line with the specific remit of the PSU. Up to 40 border guards (Bureau for Immigration and Naturalization) will be deployed, in order to enhance border management and patrol. In addition, prosecutors, public defenders and corrections staff are scheduled to be deployed. In terms of managing the hub, a hub manager has been hired and is located in the hub.<sup>7</sup> The job of the hub manager is to put systems in place for the smooth functional and administrative management of the hub. The hub manager will not have any role in tasking the police or justice personnel, as the latter have their own line of authority and command and control from the capital, Monrovia.

Putting sustainability issues front and centre is a key factor that will help ensure the success of the hub. The ability and willingness of the Government to meet the recurring costs associated with the maintenance of the hub compound<sup>8</sup>, the servicing of vital communications equipment and vehicles, the provision of salaries, food and the upkeep of offices and living quarters are all key indicators for sustainability. In developing and rolling out the hub concept every effort has been made to engage the Ministry of Finance in the planning process. This approach appears to be paying off and funding has been set aside to cover all running costs associated with the Gbarnga hub for the fiscal budget 2012/13, while hub funding has also been factored into the government's medium term budgetary framework.

### **Going Forward**

While respecting that every context is different, there has been some indication that the hub model being developed in Liberia could be a useful model and adapted to the justice and security needs of other post-conflict set-

tings. While this may well be the case, it is as yet too early to say. A cautious approach will need to be taken before deciding to replicate the hub concept in other settings given that the lessons learning process is still ongoing in the case of Liberia and secondly, considerable planning and preparation would be needed to determine the suitability for replication elsewhere. In order to better understand the value of the hub and the trajectory of change, it will be important to monitor the effectiveness of the hubs in Liberia over the coming years so as to see what further lessons in addition to those outlined above can be learnt. In this regard, a Performance Management Plan (PMP) has been put in place in order to set a baseline for results that can be measured over time. The PMP includes a desk review of the numerous studies undertaken in the hub region on justice and security issues,<sup>9</sup> a perception survey undertaken by the Liberia Peacebuilding Office in the three counties covered by the first hub, completed in June 2012, and, finally, a process is being put in place to cross-reference the relevant data systematically collected by UNMIL and the Government of Liberia. With the hub becoming operational in real time over the coming months, the Government of Liberia, civil society, donors and the UN are working hard to ensure enhanced justice and security services, which is the measure of hub success. 

## NOTES

- 1 The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) is an intergovernmental advisory body that supports peace efforts in countries emerging from conflict, and is a key addition to the capacity of the International Community in the broad peace agenda. The Peacebuilding Commission plays a unique role in the following areas: (1) bringing together all of the relevant actors, including international donors, the international financial institutions, national governments, troop contributing countries; (2) marshalling resources and (3) advising on and proposing integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery and where appropriate, highlighting any gaps that threaten to undermine peace.
- 2 For an overview of the recommendations for the UNMIL drawdown plan see Special Report of the Secretary General on the UN Mission in Liberia, 16 April 2012. S/2012/230.
- 3 For an overview of the PBF project see PBF Quick Start Project - Justice and Security Hub Gbarnga <http://www.lr.undp.org/Documents/PDF/Quick-Start-Project-Documents.pdf>.
- 4 Nimba is the most populous county after Montserrado. All three counties are regarded as conflict prone and share their borders with countries that are regarded as fragile.
- 5 The so-called service component has a number of different facets, including support for deployment of prosecutors, public defenders and corrections staff to the hub, the installation of a durable communication system for the hub and working through local civil society and media actors so that citizens become aware of the purpose of the hub, how to access police and justice services and how to resolve disputes at the community level. The service component also includes joint training for justice and security personnel, so that the criminal justice chain can work more effectively. In addition, there will be a public services office located in the hub that can provide both information to the public and where citizens will also have a means to lodge complaints and petitions.
- 6 For example, the entire annual GoL budget for the fiscal year 2012/13 is approx. 672 million USD, which is less than the annual budget of many US universities for instance.
- 7 This post is financed by the PBF for one year after which it is expected that the post will be financed by the Government of Liberia.
- 8 The recurring costs were calculated as part of a security sector public expenditure re-

view (PER) undertaken jointly in 2012 by the World Bank and UNMIL.

- 9 These studies include, for example, 'Patterns of Conflict and Cooperation in Liberia: Prospects for Conflict Forecasting and Early Warning: IPA, February 2012; 'Liberia Armed Violence Observatory', Final Report on progress, Land Mine Action, December 2011; 'Can we teach peace and conflict resolution?' Results from a randomized evaluation of the community empowerment program in Liberia, IPA October 2011; 'A population based survey on attitudes about security dispute resolution and post conflict reconstruction in Liberia, Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, June 2011.

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