

# PrepCon 2021 summary

On Thursday 18 November 2021, a one-day event called “Bridging the Law enforcement Gap in South Sudan” took place in Regency Hotel, Juba, South Sudan. 16 participants representing UNPOL, UNDP, SSNPS (national police), civil society and the Dutch Embassy, had an open discussion about current police capabilities, main challenges to police, and what is currently on offer and needed in terms of police training and police assistance.

The event was officially opened by the Dutch Ambassador to South Sudan, who emphasized the importance of police in current security developments in many remote areas of South Sudan, and therefore their role in security perceptions by local communities. He drew on earlier experience in contributing to the OECD handbook on SSR and best practices done in SSR programming by the Netherlands in Burundi, where perspectives of security actors, political authorities and communities varied widely. Therefore it was of crucial importance that people learned to understand and appreciate each other’s perspective, views and language used to express them. Even when the opinions differed, it was important to note that “every perception is true in its consequences.”

## **Law enforcement as community priority through HSS**

After the opening, the topic of the session was elaborated by PAX: due to extensive data collection and validation workshops among communities, the development of law enforcement in the survey localities was often subject of discussion, and police also tends to be contributing to data validation workshops in which limitations to their capabilities are openly discussed and acknowledged. According to many communities, the presence of many arms in the hands of civilians often leads to random acts of criminal and communal violence. These communities often call for improved presence and capabilities of police to combat alternative community self-protection mechanisms. As many solutions to this problems lie in Juba, PAX felt the need to bring this topic up from the local to the national level and discuss what could be done to support these community calls for improved law enforcement. Brief personal introductions and the institutions they represented proved the starting point for open exchanges.

After that the Project Lead of the Human Security Survey by PAX provided a short introduction into the relevant parts of the annual community perception survey, regarding the accessibility and performance of police and other security actors. According to the data over five locations in late 2020/early 2021, it turned out that an average of 70% indicated that the police had a presence in their community, scoring highest among all mentioned security actors. 69% of civilians thought that the police generally did a good job, 11% thought they did a bad job, 19% said it was ‘just OK’. The multiple choice question on how police performance could be improved, was answered by 71% with “they should be better trained”, 68% said they need a “bigger presence”, and 50% said “the police needs to be more responsive towards civilians”, among other replies. Most participants regarded these views as indeed reflective of reality in communities.

## **Priorities from local SSNPS Commissioners**

After a coffee/tea break, three SSNPS Police Commissioners gave short testimonies about the main challenges in their respective counties (Bor South, Awerial and Magwi), ranging from cattle raiding, forced marriages, road ambushes and disputes among communities who are usually better armed than them. In Eastern Equatoria, additional worries were farmer-pastoralist tensions, and the requirements of having technical expertise in assessing agricultural damage. Main general challenges to policing across the country were the lack of mobility due to bad roads and the shortage of vehicles and fuel. Strained relations with the military, with whom joint units have been formed, create tensions. The lack of a pension scheme in South Sudan leads to numbers of ‘ghost police’, people listed to receive payments and benefits, while they cannot function as police anymore, or never did. The average age of police is also mounting, making the need for more young recruitment necessary, while numbers of police officers are already (too) low in many rural areas.

## **Demand-supply of training not balanced?**

Police Commissioners were also asked what training they needed, and the type and level of training they usually requested (“the roles of police”, administration, the rule of law, how to do technical investigations, etc.) seemed to be somewhat different and more basic than the trainings currently offered by UNPOL and UNDP (Human Rights, SGBV management, community policing), leading to an

apparent disconnect between the UN mandate on police training and demands from the field reality. We noted that the term “community policing” is potentially confusing, as this term means a close cooperating relationship between formal police structures and the surrounding civilian community in official SSR use, while in communities the term was coined to refer to “informal police”, e.g. untrained armed youth acting as if they were police by conducting police operations like patrolling, searches, arrests, etc. Also the SSNPS Field Commissioners continued using the term in this sense, for instance when the Police Commissioner from Aweril County (Lakes) indicated his police force cooperates with the “community police” because they provide information from areas where the police has insufficient coverage. This was somewhat similar to UNPOL which relied on Community Watch Groups in the PoC sites in providing early warning and sharing of information.

### **UN efforts**

UNDP based its efforts on UN resolution 2567 and its successful securing of PoC sites, of which only one remains after these sites were transferred over the last 1,5 years to the national authorities. UNPOL usually trains the police officers already in the system (so not the new recruits) and focuses also on the training of trainers. In the context of Quick Impact Projects, the construction or renovation of infrastructure has been supported, for instance by building 10 police stations in Jonglei. UNDP focuses its efforts on in-force training (mostly on SGBV cases), integrated on formal and informal justice provision (chiefs) and human rights-infused leadership training for brigadiers and higher levels, training on community policing, conflict related sexual violence, case management & operational procedures, etc. (which were largely similar to the trainings supported by the South Sudan Law Society, SSLS).

There was disagreement as to the likelihood of recruiting many women to join the police in South Sudan. The data suggests this notion holds great support among communities, and while the number of women in SSNPS is rising, it was claimed there are still many cultural aspects holding women participation back, as police is still seen by many as a men's job and many aspects of police work are deemed unsuitable to women (such as long periods away from home in the pursuit of stolen cattle).

When discussing the future of SSR in South Sudan, it was concluded that while international support was needed to expand SSR programming and police assistance towards the future, insufficient attention was given to the national government, and the need for them to provide the basic requirements of police that were now often lacking, such as stationaries in the office, vehicles, fuel and the timely distribution of salaries. Police Commissioners indicated that they haven't received sufficient assistance from the national government for years.