

Gender-Sensitive Police Reform in Post-Conflict Societies

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On the cover: Women officers of the Formed Police Unit of the Nigerian contingent of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) participate in a medal parade held in honour of their service. 14 August 2008, Gbanga, Liberia

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Introduction

In early 2007, the Government of India sent over 100 highly trained women police officers to the Republic of Liberia, as the first all-female United Nations (UN) peacekeeping contingent. Early reports suggest that their presence in Liberia is helping to bring Liberian women out, both to register their complaints and to join the Liberian police service. The unit is making security services more accessible to ordinary women in a country with high rates of gender-based violence, including sexual violence.¹ The contingent is a bold example of the UN's broad aspiration to implement gender-sensitive police reform in post-conflict States.

In the last decade, women's engagement in democratic governance, conflict resolution and economic activity, which are key components of the sustainability of peace in post-conflict contexts, has grown rapidly. Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) mandated UN Member States to recognize this fact and ensure women's participation in peace processes. However, women face formidable constraints to effective engagement in public life after conflict, not least because of the threat or the experience of gender-based violence. **Women's physical security is therefore an essential prerequisite to their effective participation in peacebuilding.** The challenge of making public and private life safe for women falls on many public institutions, among which police services are central. With proper support, reformed police services can play a central role in promoting women's peacebuilding work.

Police recovery and reform are widely understood to be among the mainstays of post-conflict recovery, as the effectiveness of all governance processes derives from effective law enforcement.² However, a wide range of concerns must be addressed in post-conflict efforts to re-es-

tablish the rule of law, and in the past, women's entitlement to security has often been an overlooked aspect of the reform process. In addition to violating their human rights, the neglect of women's security needs can compromise the inclusiveness and sustainability of peacebuilding and efforts to build democratic governance after conflict. As a contribution towards more effective, rights-based and sustainable programming in this area, this briefing note reviews key components of gender-sensitive police reform in post-conflict States.

To further the UN's commitment to empower women and work towards gender equality in times of war and of peace,³ in 2006, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Development Programme's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (UNDP/BCPR) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) commissioned a study of the UN's experience in gender-sensitive police reform that would capture best practices to contribute towards the development of minimum standards for policing policy and operations.⁴

This study focused specifically on lessons learned from gender-sensitive police reform in Kosovo, Liberia and the Republic of Sierra Leone. The study's findings show that gender-sensitive police reform constitutes a vital instrument in advancing the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and implementing women's human rights entitlements under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It is an excellent means by which to establish accountable, equitable, effective and rights-respecting police services that are capable of delivering for women in crisis and post-conflict situations.⁵ This briefing note outlines key elements of gender-sensitive police reform, based on findings from the inter-agency study and lessons emerging from UNIFEM and UNDP programming in other countries.⁶

Definitions

Gender-sensitive police reform is based on the premise that women's and men's socially constructed roles, behaviours, social positions, access to power and resources create gender-specific vulnerabilities or gendered insecurities, some of which are particularly salient during and after conflict, because sexual violence may have been used as a weapon of war and may continue at high levels when conflict is formally ended. Gender analysis is therefore applied to police reform processes, ensuring that gender equality principles are systematically integrated at all stages of its planning, design, implementation and evaluation. Gender-sensitive police reform also addresses, for instance, how the construction of gender identities shapes perceptions of security and police mandates.

Gender-sensitive police services aim to prevent and respond to the specific security needs of women and men, boys and girls.

Gender-sensitive police reform should also contribute towards building police institutions that are non-discriminatory, reflective of the diversity of citizens and accountable to the population at

large. Police services would thus be better able to fulfill their essential mandate of upholding the rule of law.

The UN's commitment to supporting gender-sensitive police reform is based on the rationale that a gender-sensitive police service can significantly enhance the security of citizens. This is paramount for human development, human rights and peace: when police services are not responsive to the different security needs of women and men, the threat of gender-based violence is far greater, particularly in post-conflict situations, seriously undermining the rule of law and post-conflict recovery efforts. Women in countries emerging from conflict are entitled to respect for and protection of their human right to gender equality. CEDAW and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) together provide powerful legal and normative authority worldwide for the requirement that police reform incorporates all measures necessary to guarantee women their rights. The UN accordingly recognizes the security sector as a duty bearer with responsibility to guarantee women's physical security—both a right in itself and an essential pre-condition for women's enjoyment for all other rights.⁷

Key elements of gender-sensitive institutional change in the reform of any institution are:

- » The institution's mandate: What is it supposed to do and for whom?
- » Operating practices, incentive systems and performance measures, as well as informal cultures: What are they supposed to do? Who does what and how? Who reviews performance?
- » The composition of staff and the division of labour and power between different social groups: Who does the work? Who makes the decisions? Who is held accountable?
- » Accountability systems: How does the institution learn, correct mistakes and respond

to changing client needs? How do internal and external actors monitor and, if needed, correct mistakes?

Post-conflict police reform designed to address problems such as corruption, excessive use of force, ethnic bias and gender discrimination must work with each of these elements of institutional change. Similarly, each of these elements comes into play in efforts to build a police service that is more responsive to women's security needs.

Mandate: Criminalizing abuses of women's rights

In some contexts where systematic abuses of women's rights are not prevented or investigated by the police, there is a profound gender bias in the legal system—in effect, there is no strong mandate to defend women's rights. Abuses of women's bodies and property, particularly when perpetrated by a male relative in the domestic arena, may be seen as a private matter not requiring police attention. Breaking the silence, including through legal reform to bring national laws up to international human rights standards, is therefore an essential first step towards building a law enforcement system that protects women.

In post-conflict contexts, legislative reform has been a priority for the women's movement and for UNIFEM and UNDP. In Liberia, for instance, one of the first new laws passed following the election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was strong legislation criminalizing rape.⁸ In Sierra Leone, the passage of three laws in June 2007 designed to strengthen women's rights in relation to marriage, inheritance and gender-based violence has been seen as essential to supporting efforts to improve the responsiveness of the police to abuses of women's rights.

Formal mandates, however, may do little to alter entrenched gender biases and discriminatory attitudes. For gender-sensitive police reform measures to be effective, they must also be internal-

ized by society and the police officers themselves. This can be a particular challenge in contexts where exerting violence against women is viewed as a male social prerogative. Unchanged attitudes and mentalities result in familiar obstacles to effective policing of abuses of women's rights, notably with regard to sexual violence:

- » underreporting by victims and witnesses; impunity for perpetrators by tacit social consensus;
- » the pressure to treat violence against women as a domestic dispute that can and should be settled outside the criminal justice system;
- » the tendency to regard child abuse as an internal family matter;
- » the stigmatization of women who experience sexual violence by known persons;
- » blaming the victim;
- » isolating the victim after trauma;
- » treating abuse as a matter of shame for the victim

Worse still, the police themselves may perpetrate crimes against women, ranging from sexual harassment on the streets to sexual assault in police cells.⁹ Even police women can be subject to gender-based discrimination and violence from male colleagues.

In traditional contexts, both the police and society at large may favor negotiation and compromise as the appropriate ways to deal with sexual violence. This can lead to situations in which men forgive men for violence committed against women. Such culturally determined behaviours are very hard to dislodge or alter through institutional reforms that do not engage with society as a whole. **Like many other public institutions, the police reproduce the stereotypes and prejudices of their society with respect to women and men.** This directly shapes the

institutional culture, affecting mandates, operations and resource allocation. For these reasons, an essential feature of legal and social change is building women's and men's awareness of women's rights and encouraging a shift in generalized gender biases through the use of media and popular culture.

Both male and female police officers require greater awareness of the nature, extent and seriousness of crimes perpetrated against women. Gender-sensitive police reform therefore needs to invest in specific training to build understanding of new mandates in law enforcement that specifically include gender-based violence. Police officers have to be trained to take these forms of violence against women and children seriously. They need to change their methods of dealing with victims and survivors who are often too afraid or too vulnerable to cope with aggressive, invasive or insensitive behaviour from officers and staff at the police station. A number of UN agencies invest in gender training for the police, notably the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNDP and UNIFEM.

While the criminalization of sexual violence is a priority for police reform in post-conflict situations, it must be accompanied by wider efforts to bring institutional mandates, doctrines and strategic missions in line with gender equality principles. For instance, the police in the Republic of Nicaragua have enshrined a 'gender perspective' as one of their nine institutional principles and values. Moreover, gender issues should be systematically integrated into all components of police training to ensure that reform efforts go beyond the issue of gender-based violence.

Operating practices, incentives, performance measures

Training must be reinforced by changes in operating protocols and procedures, concrete incentives to motivate and reward changed practices,

and sanction systems to prevent or punish failure to comply with a gender equality mandate. Finally, performance measures should record staff commitment to gender equality principles, as reflected by new types of policing that respond to women's and men's needs so that these innovations do not go unrecognized.

Operational protocols and procedures translate new mandates into new practices. In relation to effective responses to gender-based violence, new operating procedures have been developed in police services around the world that mandate the arrest of perpetrators upon reasonable suspicion (instead of persuading women to return to a violent partner), mandatory reporting to a higher officer, and assistance in providing medical attention to victims.¹⁰

Another visible change in operating practices involves setting up dedicated police units to address crimes against women. Women's police stations, family support units and women's desks are intended to provide an environment in which women subject to violence feel safer registering their complaints and taking steps to seek prosecution. They are often staffed exclusively by female police personnel or women and men specially trained to deal with survivors of sexual crimes and to build effective investigations. Women's police stations and dedicated gender units help to counter the underreporting of crimes against women that is ubiquitous in patriarchal societies, as well as in their police services. By allocating specific resources to deal with sexual violence, a strong message is sent to the population about the end of impunity for these crimes. At the same time, these measures contribute to rebuilding trust among the civilian population in security sector institutions.¹¹

In April 2005 the Liberian National Police established the Women and Child Protection Unit (WACPU) with help from the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and UNICEF. WACPU



Mongolian Peacekeepers of the 8th Contingent trained at the Tavan Tolgoi Peace Operations Support Training Centre, shown here, are to be deployed for the protection of the Special Court for Sierra Leone. 26/Jul/2009. Tavan Tolgoi, Mongolia. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe.

works with various governmental and non-governmental entities, supported by the Gender-Based Violence Inter-Agency Task Force, which coordinates the efforts of the UN and other donors. Similarly, in Rwanda, the gender desk of the Gender-Based Violence Office (GBV Office) at the headquarters of the Rwandan National Police was launched in May 2005 with UNIFEM and UNDP support.¹² The GBV Office was created to strengthen the former Child and Family Protection Unit and to respond to the legacy of sexual violence, especially rape, as an act of genocide.

Gender-sensitive police reform has, in many places, led to the creation not only of the special women's police stations mentioned above, but also to dedicated police units specifically designed to fight sexual violence, domestic violence, human trafficking and prostitution, in the form of Domestic Violence Units, for instance.

In recognizing the need for specialized approaches to gender-based violence in law enforcement, the UN General Assembly passed resolution 52/86 on 'Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Measures to Eliminate Violence against Women.'¹³ This resolution provides guiding principles for the design of new operating practices and procedures to be applied in specialized units.

Another vital operational measure for main-

streaming gender equality concerns into police practices is the physical and communications infrastructure in a police station that allows staff to attend to and record the complaints, depositions and narratives of survivors of sexual violence. Toll-free telephone hotlines for rape crisis, dedicated vehicles servicing the gender units, ambulances, separate medical examination rooms, private spaces for interviews, and tie-ups with shelters that provide longer stays for women who cannot return home are some basic elements of how a gender-sensitive infrastructure can better serve survivors of sexual violence. Occasionally, higher-order facilities like medical treatment and social, legal and psychological counselling, provided by non-governmental organizations are also integrated into the reformed police station.

Dedicated gender units within the police can support attitudinal change in the general public and encourage better reporting of gender-based crimes. They can have a similar effect on the attitudes of male and female police officers. The creation of a gender unit in the Kosovo Police Service, for instance, helped bring human trafficking and forced prostitution—major problems in post-conflict Kosovo—out into the

open and made them priority issues for the police. For this positive effect to occur, however, it is essential that dedicated gender units do not become undesirable departments to work in, underrecognized and underrewarded. Powerful incentives must be provided to encourage police personnel to work in this demanding area, including promotions, visibility, public approval and psychosocial support. Personal commitment to gender equality should be rewarded and considered an indispensable complement to wider institutional commitment.

In Liberia, WACPU has acquired something of the prestige of an elite task force within the larger body of the police, in part because donor support has ensured that these police units are better equipped than some of their counterparts. Police officers thus want to be associated with gender-related work; it does not carry the common stigma of being a neglected or low-priority backwater.

Sanction systems to prevent and punish non-compliance with new mandates, policies and operating procedures are a central element in strengthening the impact and sustainability of all other elements of gender-sensitive police reform. Internal correction systems as well as external oversight mechanisms (see below) need to integrate new benchmarks, codes of conduct and

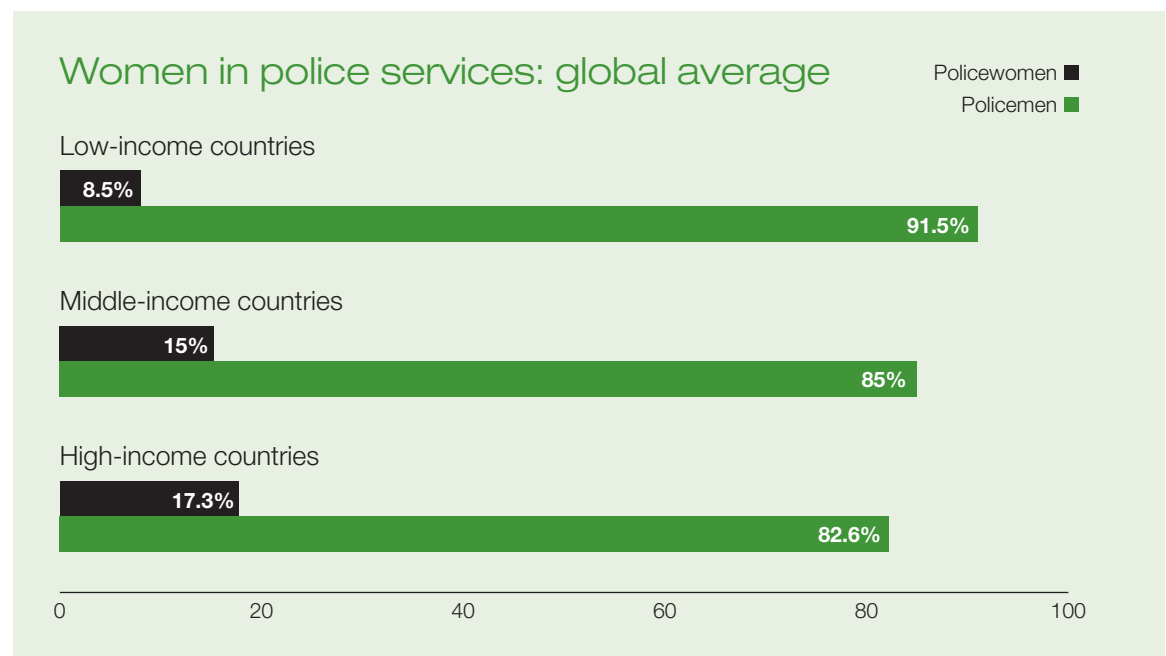
standards of operations.

Finally, gender sensitivity in operating practices should also be reflected in recruitment: commitment to gender equality principles as an institutional value should form an integral part of job requirements.

Staff composition: Divisions of labour and power¹⁴

Police work in all societies is seen as a ‘man’s job.’ This is evident from the fact that in most countries of the world, women are poorly represented among police personnel, as the figure below illustrates. Australia, with 29.9 per cent of women in its police service, and South Africa, with 29 per cent, are among the world leaders in this respect, but the exceedingly low numbers of women elsewhere testify to substantial barriers to women’s access to police work and to problems with retention of female staff once employed.

Increasing women’s representation in police services is seen as an important element of gender-sensitive police reform for a number of reasons: It is expected to support more effective community relations, since a police service whose composition more adequately reflects the population it serves may result in a greater perception of legitimacy. It can potentially moderate extremes in the



use of force. Above all, it can result in a police service that responds with greater alacrity and commitment to preventing abuses of women's rights. More women in the police does not automatically guarantee a more gender-sensitive police service, however, because incentive systems and training may still reinforce operating practices that discriminate against women, particularly if women in the police are present in just token numbers.¹⁶

For this reason, efforts to recruit women must 'aim high' in the sense of seeking to attract large numbers of women to improve gender parity. Recruitment drives targeting women must avoid gendered divisions of labour and power that relegate women to the lower ranks and the least-valued tasks.

In post-conflict Sierra Leone, the police set a quota of 30 per cent for female officers, and it is halfway to achieving this goal. The Kosovo Police Service currently succeeds in recruiting 18 per cent women, above the Balkan average of 14 per cent. UNMIL developed a gender policy for the Liberian National Police that includes efforts not just to recruit and train more female officers, but also to ensure that they are not isolated in the lower ranks. Women are placed in leadership roles in the police hierarchy, and the newly created Association of Women Police Officers enables them to build a culture of support among themselves. Furthermore, the Kosovo Police Service not only has women officers in all its units, but several of them occupy senior positions—a tactic that has a trickle-down effect and keeps women's morale high.

Effective gender-sensitive police reform ensures that women are promoted to the higher echelons in order to subsequently serve as role models for other women wishing to enter and rise through the ranks. Likewise, these reforms should focus on promoting women's equal representation in operational posts, actively addressing women's frequent marginalization to non-operational and administrative posts.

Post-conflict contexts can offer special opportunities for attracting larger numbers of women recruits to the police because of the way conflict may have changed traditional gender roles, with women taking on new roles as community leaders and even combatants. At the same time, a frequent obstacle to gender parity in police services in post-conflict contexts is that women may lack qualifications as a result of years of neglected schooling, which can either prevent them from entering the service in the first place or exclude them from promotions. In Liberia, the Liberian National Police addresses this problem by providing free education at the high-school level to young girls who are willing to undergo specialized police training once they are awarded their high-school diplomas.

Making the workplace a safe and supportive environment for women is an essential part of attracting women to and retaining them in the police. First and foremost, female officers must be protected from sexual harassment by colleagues. Zero tolerance policies with respect to sexual harassment and abuse are essential elements of gender-sensitive police reform and must be backed by strong enforcement actions, including complaints mechanisms, to demonstrate high-level commitment to gender equality. In addition, family- and child-support policies—including maternity and paternity leave, maternity uniforms, and time off on working days for female officers to nurse infants—have been introduced in some contexts to retain female recruits. These policies have been deemed effective in retaining women in the Kosovo Police Service, for instance. Gender-sensitive police reform recognizes that women have special workplace needs related to their physical safety and their child- and family-care responsibilities. Women's unequal access to education in some instances—owing to entrenched societal gender biases—might require additional investment in training to ensure that women are able to obtain

education and experience on equal footing with their male colleagues and that policewomen can meet prerequisites for promotion. In addition, both women and men experience high levels of stress associated with working with survivors of sexual violence; this must be addressed through psychosocial support services.

Thus just as new physical infrastructure is often required for effective policing of crimes against women, new physical infrastructure may be needed to support the operational effectiveness of female staff.

Accountability systems: Responding and correcting

Gender-sensitive police reform requires that women become engaged in holding the police to account. Ensuring the accountability of security services in any country presents important challenges. Effective civilian and democratic oversight of security services, for instance, depends upon the level of transparency and democratic participation in any country. Beyond encouraging women in national politics to participate in parliamentary defence and internal security committees, there are other means of enhancing women's engagement in oversight mechanisms.

Police review boards, national human rights commissions, community-police liaison committees and international organizations can improve the relationships between women and the police, opening up channels for making complaints or supporting the police to better respond to women's needs. Such complaint mechanisms should also be expanded to include complaints by internal actors and address wider issues of discrimination based on sex, ethnicity and HIV status, among others.

Another key to effective accountability is public consultation that enables dialogue between the police and individual women, as well as the wider public, including members

of the women's movement, human rights organizations, marginalized ethnic groups and advocacy groups that focus on HIV and AIDS. Such consultations could form part of policy design, implementation and monitoring.

The Kosovo Police Service works closely with a network of 85 organizations in the Kosovo Women's Network, as well as with UNIFEM, to ensure that the police are regularly apprised of women's needs and concerns. The GBV Office of the Rwanda National Police is supported by UNIFEM and UNDP to likewise engage with local women's organizations so that it is better able to design and deliver its response to gender-based violence.

Finally, new operating systems should be backed by gender-sensitive information systems that allow for evidence-based performance reviews and evaluations. These would also constitute a tool for gender-sensitive planning and better gender analysis in policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Conclusion

In post-conflict contexts, there is a particularly strong need for gender-sensitive police reform. Such environments also frequently present opportune conditions for pursuing institutional change in law enforcement institutions and practices. This briefing note has drawn out four dimensions of institutional change that are evident in current gender-sensitive police reform efforts in some post-conflict countries:

- » Changing mandates to direct the police to respond to crimes against women;
- » Putting in place new operating practices, incentive systems and performance measures to motivate and reward new forms of policing that respond to women's needs;
- » Recruiting women and implementing measures to retain and promote them; and
- » Engaging women in accountability systems.

It is important to note that gender-sensitive police reform is still relatively new. While some regions, such as Latin America, are quite advanced in terms of setting up infrastructure to address crimes against women, others are still coping with deeply gender-biased legal frameworks. UNIFEM and UNDP will continue to support national efforts to make police services more inclusive and responsive, broader UN efforts to mainstream gender equality concerns and advance women's human rights, and other system-wide efforts to build coherence in post-conflict security sector reform. Looking forward, effective and coherent gender-sensitive police reform will

require the setting of performance standards for addressing women's needs, effective monitoring systems to track compliance, and quantitative and qualitative evaluation to assess impact. Women are an indispensable part of the process of peacebuilding and social stabilization. After conflict, re-establishing a viable police service as quickly as possible, and ensuring that it is gender responsive in both recruitment and policing, is essential to allow women to recover from the effects of extreme violence and to move forward with the business of rebuilding their lives and those of their families.

Endnotes:

- 1 'India's toughest women gear up for UN deployment to violence-torn Liberia,' International Herald Tribune, Friday 8 September 2006, www.ihf.com. See also Muneeza Naqvi, 'All Female Peacekeeper Squad to Deploy,' Washington Post, 19 January 2007, www.washingtonpost.com.
- 2 Police reform is a component of security sector reform (SSR), which, writ large, is essential to establishing the rule of law, building accountable institutions and promoting effective and democratic governance. The UN is in the process of reviewing its approach to SSR; a report on SSR by the Secretary-General, expected by late 2007, will constitute a first step towards this aim.
- 3 UNDP's Eight Point Agenda (www.undp.org/cpr/we_do/8_pa.shtml) and UNIFEM strategic goals.
- 4 William G. O'Neill, Report on Gender and Police Reform in Post-Conflicts, UNDP/BCPR, UNIFEM, DPKO/UN Police/Best Practices, January 2007. Detailed field notes on gender-sensitive police reform in all three sites—Liberia, Sierra Leone and Kosovo—are available as unpublished mimeos upon request from UNIFEM's New York office. The field notes cover 2006 to 2007.
- 5 For example, the UNDP–UNIFEM joint programme with the police in the Republic of Rwanda: 'Enhancing Protection from Gender-Based Violence'
- 6 Note: The relationship between the police and the prison population is a separate subject that requires in-depth treatment. Police reform for prisoners, even female prisoners, is not addressed in this brief.
- 7 For more information regarding the application of CEDAW and Security Council resolution 1325 to post-conflict recovery and reconstruction efforts, see UNIFEM, 'CEDAW and Security Council Resolution 1325: A Quick Guide,' New York: UNIFEM, 2006.
- 8 The December 2005 law criminalizes gang rape—making it a non-bailable offence—marital rape and rape against minors.
- 9 A report based on participatory research conducted from 1999 to 2000 in 23 countries and prepared for the World Bank's 'World Development Report 2001' found that many poor people in developing countries perceived the police to be the most corrupt and most predatory public institution, particularly with regard to poor women (Deepa Narayan, Robert Chambers, Meera Kaul Shah, and Patti Petesch, 'Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change,' New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 10 See the sample protocol for addressing gender-based violence available in: Economic Community for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 'Report of the ECLAC-CDCC/CIDA Gender Equality Programme Regional Conference on Gender-Based Violence and the Administration of Justice,' Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 3–5 February 2003. Available online: www.eclac.org/cgi-bin/getProd.asp?xml=/publicaciones/xml/3/12533/P12533.xml&xsl=/portofspain/tpl-i/p9f.xsl&base=/portofspain/tpl/top-bottom.xslhttp://www.eclac.cl/publicaciones/xml/3/12533/lcarg744.pdf.
- 11 More monitoring and evaluation will be required to produce evidence of the impact of women's police stations, and to continue learning how to improve them. UNDP is supporting national partners in such efforts, for instance the national police in Nicaragua.
- 12 Letitia Anderson, 'GBV Offices: A sign of progress in UNIFEM partnership with Rwandan police,' New York: UNIFEM, 18 April 2007, online at: http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/voices_from_the_field/story.php?StoryID=588.
- 13 Data references available from UNIFEM upon request.
- 14 Sandra Grey, Manon Tremblay, Drude Dahlerup, Sarah Childs and Mona Lee Krook, 'Do Women Represent Women? Rethinking the "Critical Mass" Debate,' *Politics and Gender* 2, No. 4, 2006: 491–530.

