

A survey of crime victims in Sierra Leone

May to June 2008



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Introduction

The crime victimisation survey conducted in Sierra Leone was part of a broader review of the empirical evidence on the state of crime and criminal justice and its impact on the political processes in four other African countries – Zambia, Tanzania, Benin and Mali – that have signed up for the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)¹. The main objective of the survey in Sierra Leone was to generate information on the prevalence of crime in this post-conflict country, as well as to make an assessment of the criminal justice system, which is still under reconstruction. The AHSI partnered with WANEP to carry out this nationwide survey.

This report presents the most important findings of the survey. The first part of the report briefly describes the methodology used in the report and the last two parts focus on the survey findings. Data were collected between 14 May and 5 June 2008.

BACKGROUND

Sierra Leone is facing similar democratisation challenges to many other post-conflict African countries. Economic development poses an even bigger challenge. As with Benin and Mali, where similar surveys were conducted by the AHSI, poverty paints a rather bleak picture for the development prospects of the country. The development indicators of Sierra Leone have remained amongst the lowest in the world. For instance, the Human Development Index (HDI)² for Sierra Leone is 0,336, which ranks the country last of the 177 countries surveyed. The country's Human Poverty Index (HPI-1) value is 51,7, which ranks it 102nd among the 108 developing countries for which the index was calculated (Table 1).

The war that raged on for almost a decade between the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels and

Table 1 Development indicators³

	Rank	
Human Development Index (2004)	177	0,336
Life expectancy at birth	173	41,8 years
Adult literacy rate: % > 15	155	34,8%
Gross enrolment: primary/secondary/tertiary	155	44,6%
GDP per capita (PPP in US\$)	169	806
Human Poverty Index⁴ (2004)		
HPI	102	51,7%
Probability of surviving past 40	167	45,6%
Adult literacy: % >15	158	65,2%
Underweight children between 0 and 5 years	106	27,0%
% without access to improved water source	106	43,0%

the government created a situation of anarchy that allowed crime to flourish over a long period of time. Demobilisation and disarmament of the RUF and Civil Defence Forces (CDF) combatants eventually contributed to reducing the tendency towards lawlessness, but the government has nevertheless been struggling to re-establish its authority and rebuild democratic security institutions since the national elections in May 2002. For some time its efforts were partly constrained by the unstable political and economic conditions being experienced by neighbouring Guinea and Liberia (see map). The challenges posed by these external forces and porous borders extended the constraints to proper policing and the democratisation of the country's security sector.

A major problem is Sierra Leone's very young population of a median age of 17,53 (Table 2). The high levels of unemployment being experienced are likely to trigger unrest in such a young population that obviously has many aspirations, especially after the brutality of war.

Table 2 Age structure in Sierra Leone (2005 estimate)

0–14 years	44,7% (male 1 318 508; female 1 371 164)
15–64 years	52,0% (male 1 494 068; female 1 637 276)
65 years and over	3,3% (male 93 047; female 103 580)

Although statistical data and indicators are available for a number of areas in the country, the understanding of crime and insecurity benefits greatly from evidence gathered scientifically. The introduction of measures to contain criminal activity requires adequate information on the dimensions and prevalence of crime. Crime victimisation surveys make it possible to fill the gaps in police statistics that do not necessarily capture all crimes, in part because of the under-reporting of crimes by the public. Though the police are expected to keep records of crimes reported by the public, accessing this information is often not easy in African countries. Police services are not mandated to release crime statistics in most countries, which compels officials and the public at large to play guessing games about crime levels. This was one of the factors motivating this study. Another factor is that definitions of crime on the African continent vary from culture to culture. There is a tendency among different police forces to define variously what constitute crimes that warrant being recorded. With rural citizens in particular experiencing difficulties in accessing justice, it was essential to tease out the extent to which the citizens of Sierra Leone in general are victims of crime.

However, crime-victim surveys do have their weaknesses. For instance, the methodology relies on the memory of the interviewees, which can be selective in that people tend to remember more heinous acts, but not milder incidents. Then, interviewees may not always be willing to reveal all their encounters with crime. And as can be expected, people are rarely willing to discuss their own involvement in corrupt acts. Nevertheless, surveys of this nature do reveal a lot of information that is important to harness the development potential of a region or a country that is hampered by crime. Such surveys also provide valuable information on police effectiveness and give pointers on where policing efforts should be concentrated. More importantly, they reveal citizens' fears concerning crime and insecurity. Such emotions do impact negatively on the socio-economic and political well-being of the public. With regard to Sierra Leone in particular, it is likely that interviewees will offset the current more secure environment against the chaos of the war, and the survey findings therefore require cautious interpretation.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The sample for the crime victimisation study (n = 1 200) was selected from the sampling frame of the National

Bureau of Statistics of Sierra Leone. The frame covered all enumeration areas in the country and was derived from the population and housing census of 2004. It was designed as a multi-stage, stratified sample, with the province as the first stratum, followed by the rural/urban level and then gender. The sample was selected according to probability proportionate to population size (Table 3).

Table 3 Sample distribution across Sierra Leone (% per province)

Province	%
Eastern	26,0
Southern	22,7
Western	20,0
Northern	31,3
Total	100,0

For the 2004 population census the country was divided into four administrative regions (the provinces), with each province sub-divided into districts, each district into local councils, each local council into chiefdoms and each chiefdom into sections. Each section was sub-divided into smaller, convenient areas called census enumeration areas (EAs). At the time of the population and housing census, Sierra Leone had four provinces and 16 districts (Table 4). About 9 671 EAs were created. The EAs have information on all households. Demarcated cartographic materials for each EA are available and these were used to locate actual starting points for the crime victimisation interviews.

Table 4 Sample distribution by district (% per district)

Rank	District	%
1	Kailahun	8,0
2	Kenema	10,0
3	Kono	6,0
4	Koidu Town	2,0
5	Bombali	6,0
6	Makeni	1,3
7	Kambia	4,7
8	Koinadugu	5,3
9	Port Loko	8,0
10	Tonkolili	6,0
11	Bo	9,3
12	Bonthe	3,3
13	Moyamba	6,0
14	Pujehun	4,0
15	Western area rural	4,0
16	Western area urban	16,0

Figure 1 Map of Sierra Leone

For the selection of the master sample, EAs were grouped by province and within each province by rural and urban location. The sample thus captures the views of 36% (54 EAs) of citizens resident in urban areas and 64% (96 EAs) inhabiting rural areas.

The sample size ($n = 1\,200$) gives a margin of error of approximately two to three percentage points at a confidence level of 95%. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with all respondents and the questionnaire was translated from English into five indigenous languages spoken by at

Table 5: Sample demographics

Language	%
English	3,3
Krio	80,2
Temne	4,4
Mende	11,9
Limbe	0,2
Total	100,0

Location	%
Urban	36,0
Rural	64,0
Total	100,0

Gender	%
Male	50,2
Female	49,8
Total	100,0

least 5% of the population. Eighty per cent of the interviews were conducted in Krio, the language spoken by most Sierra Leoneans. This was followed by Mende, the language mostly used in the northern parts of the country. Almost a third (29,3%) of the population is uneducated or has

Education	%
None	29,3
Informal schooling only (including Koranic schooling)	11,1
Some primary schooling	7,8
Primary school completed	5,8
Some secondary or high schooling	21,5
Secondary or high school completed	12,9
Post-secondary qualifications	4,2
Some university or university completed	2,5
Higher Teacher Certificate (HTC)	0,1
Other than university, e.g. a diploma or degree from a technical college	3,9
No response	0,9
Total	100,0

Head of household	%
Yes	25,2
No	74,5
No response	0,3
Total	100,0

had some informal education. Just 13,6% have completed primary school only and less than a quarter (21,5%) have gone through secondary school. Combating illiteracy is thus a major challenge for the government. Post-secondary qualifications are even rarer at 6,4% (Table 5).

Perceptions on crime and policing in Sierra Leone

GENERAL BELIEFS ON CRIME

In general, crime (for a definition of crime see the appendix) is believed to have decreased, as reported by 47,3% of respondents (Table 6). A similar view is held with regard to the incidence of violent and property crimes: 50% and 41,4% of the respondents respectively considered that

Table 6 Change across crime categories over the last three years

Question asked: How do you think the level of crime in your area has changed in the last three years?	
Crime in general	%
Increased	30,4
Decreased	47,3
Stayed the same	22,3
Question asked: How do you think the level of violent crime (e.g. robbery, rape, assault, murder) in your area has changed in the last three years?	
Violent crime	%
Increased	23,9
Decreased	50,3
Stayed the same	24,1
Don't know	1,7
Question asked: How do you think the level of property crime (e.g. burglary, theft) in your area has changed in the last three years?	
Property crime***	%
Increased	28,9
Decreased	41,4
Stayed the same	28,4
Don't know	1,3

violent and property crimes had reduced. However, almost one in 4 (24,1%) were of the opinion that violent crime had remained the same, while a slightly higher proportion, 28,4%, felt that property crime levels had stayed the same.

Theft of property tops the list of the most recurrent crime across all provinces at 33,5% (Table 7). The concentration of the population in urban areas as a result of displacements during the war could have partly contributed to this phenomenon. This finding is in line with findings in other urban areas in West Africa, as evidenced by the recent AHSI survey in Bamako, Mali. Livestock theft comes in second at 24,5%, followed by crop theft at 17,9%. Agricultural production is rather low in Sierra Leone since the war, and there has been a tendency to rely on food aid even after the end of the war. Assault, a crime involving physical contact, was reported by 10,6% of the respondents.

Table 7 The most recurrent crimes (%)

Question asked: What one type of crime occurs most in your area?	
Crime	%
Theft of property	33,5
Crop theft	17,9
Livestock theft	24,5
Pick-pocketing/bag snatching	2,6
Housebreaking	2,6
Murder	0,7
Sexual assault/rape	0,8
Robbery	2,7
Assault	10,6
Theft of motor vehicle	0,3
Land grabbing/land disputes	1,5

Table 8 The most recurrent crimes across the provinces (%)

Question asked: What one type of crime occurs most in your area?					
Crime	Eastern (%)	Southern (%)	Western (%)	Northern (%)	National (%)
Theft of property	24,4	42,3	49,6	24,5	33,5
Livestock theft	34,3	18,4	1,2	35,6	24,5
Crop theft	21,5	19,5	1,7	24,2	17,9
Pick-pocketing/bag snatching	5,4	0,0	5,4	0,3	2,6
Assault	4,2	13,6	19,2	8,2	10,6
Housebreaking	2,6	1,5	7,5	0,3	2,6
Robbery	5,1	0,0	6,7	0,0	2,7
Land grabbing/land disputes	0,3	1,5	2,1	2,1	1,5
Murder	0,0	0,0	1,7	1,1	0,7
Theft of motor vehicle	0,0	0,4	0,0	0,5	0,2

There is some variation across the provinces, but property and livestock theft are the dominant crimes throughout (Table 8). In the eastern and northern provinces, which are the more rural provinces and border Liberia, livestock theft is the most recurrent crime (34,3% and 35,6% respectively). Property theft is most recurrent in the southern and western provinces. Assault is highest in the western and southern provinces (19,2% and 13,6% respectively). Housebreaking, robbery and pick-pocketing are experienced more by the inhabitants of the western province, which hosts the capital, Freetown.

Table 9 The most feared crimes in the country (%)

Question asked: What one crime are you most afraid of in this area?	
Crime	%
Murder	28,9
Cattle-rustling	13,1
Property theft	10,4
Armed robbery	9,8
Assault	7,6
Housebreaking	6,2
Car theft	4,9
Crop theft	4,5
Sexual assault	3,1
Pick-pocketing	1,8
Land seizure	1,6
Kidnapping	0,7
Embezzlement	0,1
Others	5,2
Don't know	2,3
Total	100,0

Feared crimes in Sierra Leone

Though murder has a low frequency, it is the most feared crime (28,9%), which is consistent with findings in Benin and Mali (Table 9). Cattle-rustling is rated at less than half the fear expressed for murder (13,1%). The most recurrent crime, property theft, only comes in third on the list of the most feared crimes. It is quite clear that crimes involving physical contact induce more fear.

Consistent with theft of personal property being the most recurrent crime, respondents reported discussing this crime most frequently (30,1%). Livestock theft was frequently discussed by 24,1% and assault by 15,1% of respondents (Table 10).

Table 10 Types of crime discussed most (%)

Question asked: What is the crime most often discussed?	
Crime	%
Theft of personal goods	30,1
Livestock/poultry theft	24,1
Assault	15,2
Robbery (excluding hijacking)	7,2
Murder	4,0
Pick-pocketing	4,7
Sexual abuse/rape	2,5
Crop theft	2,4
Housebreaking	2,2
Domestic violence	1,6

The majority of respondents (65,8%) opt for social development as a way of combating property crimes (Table 11).

Just over a quarter (27,9%) prefer the strengthening of law enforcement, while less than one in ten (6,2%) prioritise harsher sentencing.

Table 11 Preferred property crime control strategies (%)

Question asked: If you could tell the government what to spend money on, which one of the following would you select in order to make your area safer in terms of property crime?	
Crime	%
Crime prevention and law enforcement (more police, etc.)	27,9
The judiciary/courts (punishment, harsher penalties for offenders)	6,2
Social development (create employment, etc.)	65,8
Don't know/No response	0,2
Total	100,0

The pattern does not change when it comes to combating violent crimes (Table 12). Here the number opting for tougher judgments doubles to 12%, those preferring social development drops by over 13% to 35,6% and those in favour of strengthening law enforcement goes up by just over 8%.

Table 12 Preferred violent crime control strategies (%)

Question asked: If you could tell the government on what to spend money on, which one of the following would you select in order to make your area safer in terms of violent crime?	
Crime	%
Crime prevention and law enforcement (more police, etc.)	35,6
The judiciary/courts (punishment, harsher penalties for offenders)	12,2
Social development (create employment, etc.)	52,2
Don't know/No response	0,1
Total	100,0

Who are the perpetrators?

Respondents were of the opinion that property crimes were being committed mostly by people living in the region (73,1%) (Table 13). Only 26,3% stated that the perpetrators were not resident in the areas where they committed crimes. The perpetrators were also largely believed to be natives of the regions where they committed crimes (68,4%).

The pattern remains similar as regards perpetrators of violent crimes (Table 14). The implication is that since people seem to know with certainty the origins of the perpetrators, solutions for combating crime lie partly with the communities themselves. For this reason, capacity-building efforts in community policing would go a long way toward reducing crime.

Table 13 Origin of property crime perpetrators (%)

Question asked: Do you think that property crimes in this area are more likely to be committed by ...?	
Origin	%
By people living in the region	73,1
By people living in other regions	26,3
Don't know	0,6
Total	100,0
By natives of the region	68,4
By natives of other regions	30,8
By foreign nationals	0,3
Don't know	0,4
Total	100,0

Table 14 Origin of violent crime perpetrators (%)

Question asked: Do you think that violent crimes in this area are more likely to be committed by ...?	
Origin	%
By people living in the region	69,0
By people living in other regions	30,7
Don't know	0,3
Total	100,0
By natives of the region	62,8
By natives of other regions	36,3
By foreign nationals	0,3
Don't know	0,8
Total	100,0

What motivates criminals?

Respondents were rather split on the causes of crimes (Table 15). Whilst some felt that engaging in crime was triggered by a real need (44,2%), 38,8% felt that crime was committed just because of greed. Another 16,6% attributed criminal behaviour to non-financial motives. The

Table 15 Likely causes of property crimes (%)

Question asked: Do you think that most of the people committing property crimes in this area are more likely to be motivated by ...?	
Cause	%
Meeting a real need	44,2
Avarice	38,8
Non-financial motivations	16,6
Don't know	0,5
Total	100,0

fact that 26,8% of respondents know someone who makes a living out of crime (Table 16) reinforces the earlier assertion that solutions lie in the strengthening of community policing efforts.

Table 16 Knowledge of criminals (%)

Question asked: Do you personally know anyone who makes a living from crime in your area?	
	%
Yes	26,8
No	71,4
Don't know/No response	1,8
Total	100,0

CORRUPTION

This section reports on experiences with petty corruption and public perceptions of levels of corruption in general. Only those who reported having experienced an encounter with a corrupt official were questioned further on the nature of the act. It is important to point out that respondents would naturally shy away from revealing their participation in corrupt acts. This implies that the number of respondents who admitted to having given bribes is under-reported.

For the period May 2007 to May 2008, only 5,6% of respondents admitted to having encountered an official who was willing to receive money in return for a service (Table 17). Figures were even lower for those requesting kickbacks and gifts.

Table 17 Experiences with corruption (%)

Question asked: During the past year, has any government official asked you or indicated to you that they'd be receptive to the following: money, a favour or a present in return for a service?		
	Yes	No
Receptive to receiving money	5,6	94,4
Receptive to receiving kickbacks	1,4	98,6
Receptive to receiving gifts	1,6	98,4

The highest incidence of corruption was experienced in law enforcement (62,2%) and 93,5% of respondents admitted to paying bribes to get the service. Medical care came in second (31,1%), but no one admitted to paying a bribe (Table 18). Both these services concern direct individual and physical security. In 10% of cases, an individual who had applied for an identity document was requested to give a bribe to get it. This was also applicable to 9,5% of respondents seeking land and accommodation. In many cases, individuals admitted to having complied by giving

bribes. When it came to essential water and electricity services, the victim gave a bribe in most cases.

Table 18 Experiences with corruption and bribes paid (%)

Questions asked		
* Question asked: Did it happen in the past year?		
** Question asked: When this incident occurred, how did you respond?		
	Yes*	Gave bribe**
Pension or social grants	2,7	50,0
Essential services (water and electricity)	5,5	66,7
Medical care	31,1	–
Law enforcement	62,2	93,5
Land and accommodation	9,5	71,4
Identity documents	10,8	–
Driver's license	6,8	80,0
Traffic fines	2,7	100,0
Job/assignments	8,1	–
Visiting a prison	5,4	–
Custom/tradition	8,1	66,7

A high percentage of respondents (43,3%) was of the opinion that corruption had decreased over the past three years, although a similar proportion (44,6%) thought that the level of corruption was unchanged. However, the number of those willing to report a corrupt official was

Table 19 Growth of corruption over the last three years (%)

	Effect	%
Current bribe level as opposed to three years ago	Increased	11,5
	Decreased	43,3
	Unchanged	44,6
	Don't know	0,7
Bribery to expedite the process of job application in the private sector	Yes	4,2
	No	95,3
	Don't know	0,6
Report a corrupt civil servant?	Yes	1,4
	No	95,3
	Don't know	0,6
If yes, to whom?	Police station	17,6
	Hotline – anonymous	29,4
	Another civil servant	35,3
	Other	5,9
	Don't know	11,8
If not, why not?	Would not make a difference	32,0
	Scared of victimisation	32,4
	Did not know where to file a complaint	142
	Not dealt with a corrupt official	7,1

rather low. This may be explained by the fact that almost one third of respondents indicated that reporting corrupt practices would not make a difference. This indicates some lack of confidence in the service delivery system.

Personal safety

An insecure environment makes it difficult for the public to go about their daily activities. In the case of rearing livestock, 13,2% indicated that they were terrified and would not do it alone (Table 20). However, the percentage of those who would do it if they had someone to help them increased fourfold to 57,6%. The public also expressed anxiety over the safety of children: almost 10% of respondents would not let children play in open spaces or walk to school alone.

Table 20 Level of fear in conducting a solitary activity (%)

Question asked: Do the levels of crime prevent you from doing any of the following in your area? If 'Yes', would you ... if accompanied by one or more people you know?		
	If alone	Would go ahead if accompanied by someone
Using public transport	4,8	50,9
Rearing livestock	13,2	57,6
Letting children play	8,1	63,9
Walking to work/town	2,6	32,3
Taking a solitary walk to shops	2,1	52,0
Going to fetch firewood	4,0	45,8
Going to fetch water	2,3	63,0
Letting children go to school	7,3	67,8

Almost 75% of respondents reported feeling safe walking unaccompanied during the day (Table 21), but at night time this figure drops to just 9,1% (Table 22). The absence of lighting, especially in crowded urban areas, is likely to increase these figures.

Table 21 Feeling safe in daytime (%)

Question asked: How safe do you feel walking alone in your area during the day?	
	%
Very safe	74,3
Fairly safe	24,3
A bit safe	1,2
Unsafe	0,2
Total	100,0

Table 22 Feeling safe at night time (%)

Question asked: How safe do you feel walking alone in your area after dark?	
	%
Very safe	9,2
Fairly safe	44,3
A bit safe	30,3
Unsafe	16,2
Total	100,0

INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO CRIME

Policing by groups other than the police

Law enforcement legislation in many countries leaves room for actors other than the police to enhance the security of citizens. Such initiatives range from neighbourhood watch groups to private security companies. In Sierra Leone, only 11% of respondents were aware of the existence of alternative providers of security (Table 23).

Table 23 Knowledge of private organisations/groups providing security at national level (%)

Question asked: Is there an active organisation or group other than the police that provides protection against crime in your community?	
	%
Yes	11,0
No	88,1
Don't know	0,9
Total	100,0

Knowledge of crime-fighting groups is concentrated in a few districts (Table 24), with the western districts reporting higher levels of knowledge. Urban areas report the presence of such groups more than rural areas.

Table 24 Knowledge of private organisations/groups providing security, per district (%)

Question asked: Is there an active organisation or group other than the police that provides protection against crime in your community?			
	Yes	No	Don't know
Kailahun	6,2	93,8	0,0
Kenema	41,7	57,5	0,8
Kono	29,2	69,4	1,4
Koidu Town	0,0	100,0	0,0
Bombali	6,9	91,7	1,4
Makeni	0,0	100,0	0,0

	Yes	No	Don't know
Kambia	5,4	94,6	0,0
Koinadugu	3,1	95,3	1,6
Port Loko	0,0	97,9	2,1
Tonkolili	0,0	100,0	0,0
Bo	0,0	99,1	0,9
Bonthe	0,0	97,5	2,5
Moyamba	0,0	100,0	0,0
Pujehun	0,0	100,0	0,0
Western area rural	20,8	79,2	0,0
Western area urban	18,2	80,2	1,6

The activities of crime-fighting groups appear to be con-
doned, as 11% reported that they administered physical
punishment (Table 25).

Table 25 Knowledge of punishment administered
by voluntary crime-fighting groups (%)

Question asked: Does this group give out or administer physical punishment to suspects?	
	%
Yes	11,0
No	88,1
Don't know	0,9
Total	100,0

Community policing

However, just 25% knew of a community policing forum
(Table 26), which implies the need for awareness of this
complementary effort.

Table 26 Responses on awareness of a
community police forum (%)

Question asked: Do you know what a Community Policing Forum is?	
	%
Yes	25,0
No	73,5
Don't know	1,5
Not Applicable	0,0
Total	100,0

INTERACTION AMONGST RESIDENTS
AND COMMUNITY COHESION

Community cohesion

Many respondents are active in associational activities,
especially in religious groups (Table 27). Such groups

could provide an entry point for organising community
policing efforts.

Table 27 Participation in community-based initiatives (%)

Question asked: Are you currently involved in any of the following community-based initiatives?	
	%
Religious groups	88,8
Associations/loan-providing groups	34,8
Funeral societies	14,8
Sporting associations	12,2
Other groups	29,6

Even though associational activism was low, people knew
their neighbours very well, with almost 90% of respond-
ents saying that they would trust their neighbours to look
after either their house or their children and to attend
family events (Table 28). This situation could be harnessed
to enhance policing efforts. There was a slight variation
across the provinces, with the southern and western
provinces expressing less enthusiasm about leaving their
children with a neighbour (Table 29).

Table 28 Interaction amongst residents (% yes answers)

	%
Do you know the name of your next-door neighbour?	92,1
Would you ask your neighbour to watch your house if you were going away?	87,4
Would you let your next-door neighbour watch your children for an evening?	85,0
Would you attend a funeral of a community member in the neighbourhood?	83,5

Table 29 Interaction amongst residents, per
district (% yes answers)

Province	Knowledge of neighbour's name	Neighbour to watch house	Neighbour to watch children	Funeral attendance in neighbourhood
Eastern	98,7	98,1	92,9	89,4
Southern	99,6	98,2	85,3	94,5
Western	99,6	95,8	85,8	93,3
Northern	100,0	98,2	94,4	89,9

Law enforcement

Almost 90% of respondents knew the police station closest
to their area of residence and 37,8% reported having

had direct contact with policemen in the last three years (Table 30). This contact had changed the respondents' opinion of the police in 60,2% of cases.

Table 30 Contact with the police (%yes answers)

	%
Do you know where the nearest police station is?	87,7
Have you been in contact with the police over the last three years	37,8
Have you been in official contact with the police outside police station premises?	16,3
Did this contact with the police affect your opinion about the police?	60,2

Over 67% of respondents live within an hour's travel of a police station (Table 31), although almost 15% live far from a security post.

Table 31 Proximity of residence to a police station (%)

Question asked: How long does it take on average to get to the police station by your usual means of travel?	
	%
Less than 30 minutes away	38,0
Less than an hour away	31,1
Less than two hours away	15,3
More than two hours away	14,8
Not applicable	0,8
Total	100,0

Less than half the citizens are satisfied with the performance of the police force, with just 46,8% giving them a positive rating (Table 32). Of these, 58,9% were of the opinion that the police are committed, 39% agreed that they arrest criminals and 33,5% said that this was because the police do turn up at the crime scene (Table 33).

Table 32 Assessments of police performance (%)

Question asked: How do you think the police are doing in your area?	
	%
Good job	46,8
Bad job	53,0
Don't know	0,3
Total	100,0

Still, the majority of respondents seemed to think that the police were doing a poor job (Table 34). The reasons given for this perception are important to understand. Over 70% of respondents accused the police of failing to police the region and 25% simply said that they were lazy.

Table 33 Reasons for the positive assessments of the police (%)

Question asked: Why do you think they are doing a good job ?	
	%
The police are committed	58,9
They are trustworthy	12,5
They respond promptly to situations	25,0
They come to the crime scene	33,5
They catch criminals	39,0
They get stolen goods back	2,5

Table 34 Reasons given for the poor performance of the police (%)

Question asked: Why do you think they are doing a poor job?	
	%
Do not have enough resources	13,7
They are lazy	25,5
They are corrupt	21,9
They do not police the region	71,3
They release criminals too soon	6,9
They work hand-in-hand with thieves	8,7
They treat victims harshly	0,3
They never get stolen goods back	4,5
They do not respond on time	27,9

Visibility of the police on the beat appears to influence these perceptions (Table 35). Just 43,5% reported seeing policemen on patrol in their area at least once a week.

Table 35 Frequency of police patrols (%)

Question asked: How often do you see a police officer in uniform/ on duty in your area?	
	%
At least once a day	21,4
At least once a week	22,1
At least once a month	31,0
Less than once a month	19,2
Never	5,8
Don't know/No response	0,6
Total	100,0

COURTS AND TRIBUNALS

Access to justice is a problem that plagues many African states and Sierra Leone is no exception. The situation here is worsened by the war, which destroyed the legal

infrastructure. Just over a quarter (26%) of respondents reported taking only 30 minutes to get to the nearest tribunal (Table 36), but 32,8% would take more than two hours.

Table 36 Accessibility of the nearest tribunal (%)

Question asked: How long does it take on average to get to the magistrate's court by means of your usual mode of transport?	
Time needed to get to the nearest tribunal	%
Less than 30 min	26,0
Less than an hour	22,2
Less than 2 hours	18,8
More than 2 hours	32,8
Don't know	0,2

Most respondents (63,8%) did express confidence in the judiciary and thought that the courts performed their duties (Table 37). Of those who had had encounters with the courts, 86,7% reported going either as a party in a case or as a witness. Satisfaction levels with court procedures and outcomes were evident.

Table 37 Views on courts of law (% yes answers)

	% yes answers
Do you think courts of law perform their duties?	63,8
Have you gone to a court of law in the past three years?	25,8
Reasons for going to a court of law	
Party to a case	49,0
As a witness	37,7
For administrative reasons	20,6
Just to attend – no specific reason	3,2
Satisfaction level after services rendered	
Were you satisfied with the prosecutor's services?	73,2
Were you satisfied with the magistrate's services?	73,5
Were you pleased with the court's treatment of offenders	63,2
Reasons behind service satisfaction	
Appropriate sentences given for crimes	82,3
The courts are not corrupt	27,6
High conviction rates	33,4
Reasons behind dissatisfaction	
Delays in case-solving and postponements	66,6
Courts too lenient	22,2
Unconditional release of offenders	36,7
Not enough convictions	8,1

Crime experiences

From May 2002 to June 2008

DOCUMENTED CRIME EXPERIENCES

Crime experiences over the past five years vs. the last year preceding the survey

Though respondents' perceptions indicate a decrease in crime, their actual experience with crime has increased over the last five years in all categories (Table 38). Sexual assault, including rape, shows the highest margin of increase of over 1 000%. General assault has more than doubled and housebreaking has increased almost four-fold. Livestock theft has increased by a margin of 28%.

Table 38 Crime experiences of respondents (%)

	Last 5 years	Last 12 months
Sexual assault	3,4	39,0
Assault	28,6	58,3
Armed robbery	5,4	55,4
Bike/car theft	8,5	47,9
Consumer fraud	14,6	58,6
Housebreaking	16,2	61,8
Property theft (incl. pick pocketing)	42,1	59,0
Crop theft	39,1	66,5
Livestock theft	55,3	70,8

In many instances, victims of crime tend to turn to alternative authorities for justice. Traditional authorities

appear to be the most favoured institutions, especially for reporting crop and livestock theft, which probably applies more to rural than urban areas (Table 39). Local gangs are the second most favoured informal institutions to which recourse is taken, with 17,1% of crop and 21,6% of livestock theft being reported to them. Local vigilante groups are used by 16,2% of crop theft victims and 10,3% of livestock theft victims. Of the formal institutions, local ward councillors handle the least number of cases at 10,5% and 11% respectively.

Table 39 Alternative structures dealing with crop and cattle theft (%)

	Crop theft	Cattle rustling
Traditional authority	53,3	52,1
Local gang	17,1	21,6
Community policing forums	–	1,8
Local vigilante groups	16,2	10,3
Local ward councillor	10,5	11,0
Private security	2,9	3,2
Total	100,0	100,0

A rather disturbing trend is that respondents showed high levels of tolerance for deviant behaviour. For example, when asked if they would report to the police if they knew of or witnessed a car being stolen, 44,1% stated that it was none of their business, while 36,1% said that they would not for fear of reprisals.

Recommendations

The crime victim survey raises a number of issues about crime and crime control strategies in Sierra Leone. The data is largely indicative and we wish to make the following recommendations:

- Law enforcement agents need to increase their presence in all provinces. Rural provinces experience a higher incidence of livestock theft, as well as a higher incidence of property theft in some instances, which, in the main, points to a deficit in policing.
- Crime patterns imply a need to create a policing mechanism at the community level that is mindful of social realities.
- There are clearly more challenges in policing rural areas and in bringing justice institutions closer to rural citizens.
- Government should toughen its crime-fighting strategies in both rural and urban areas to ensure the security of citizens. Such measures should go hand-in-hand with the formulation of socio-economic upliftment policies to improve the welfare of the population.
- Victims know the origins of the perpetrators of violent crimes. The implication of this revelation is that the solutions for combating crime lie partly with the communities themselves. Capacity-building efforts in community policing would therefore go a long way in reducing crime.

Notes

- 1 To date, 28 African countries have signed up for the APRM.
- 2 See the 2007/2008 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (UNDP, *Human Development Report 2007/2008. Fighting climate change: Human solidarity in a divided world*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). The HDI provides a composite measure of three dimensions of human development: living a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), being educated (measured by adult literacy and enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary level), and having a decent standard of living (measured by purchasing power parity (PPP) income).
- 3 2007/2008 Human Development Report
- 4 The Human Poverty Index for developing countries (HPI-1) focuses on the proportion of people below a threshold level in the same dimensions of human development as HDI. By looking beyond income deprivation, HPI-1 represents a multi-dimensional alternative to the US\$1 a day (PPP) poverty measure. It measures severe deprivation in health by the proportion of people who are not expected to survive age 40. Education is measured by the adult illiteracy rate, while a decent standard of living is measured by the unweighted average of people without access to an improved water source and the proportion of children under age five who are underweight for their age. See the 2007/2008 Human Development Report.

Appendix

Definitions of crime

Term	Definition
Assault or threat of assault (including domestic violence)	Includes being attacked, physically beaten or threatened by an attacker in a frightening way without the attacker taking any property from the victim. Assault is the unlawful and intentional direct or indirect application of force to the body of another person, as well as the threat of the application of immediate personal violence to another.
Consumer fraud	Occurs when someone selling something or delivering a service cheats the buyer in terms of quantity or quality of the goods or service.
Deliberate damage, burning or destruction of dwellings	Includes acts of deliberately setting fire to or damaging a household's dwelling, its outbuildings that may be used for household functions or for agricultural purposes, and buildings or parts of buildings that may be used by any member of the household for commercial purposes. Forced removal is excluded.
Hijacking of a motor vehicle	Occurs when someone uses force* to steal or attempt to steal a car, truck, van or pick-up belonging to a household when a member or members of the household are inside, or just outside, the vehicle.
Housebreaking and burglary	Occurs when someone breaks into the dwelling without permission and steals or attempts to steal something.
Murder	Includes a deliberately inflicted death, which may occur during housebreaking, hijack, assault, including domestic violence, or rape or in any other circumstances. Ritual or multi-related murders or killings fall into this crime category. Murder is treated as a household crime because the victim cannot report its occurrence. According to some definitions, murder consists of the unlawful and intentional killing of another human being.
Robbery (including aggravating circumstances)	Involves forcefully* taking property from a person, or using the threat of force, i.e. by pointing a knife at someone and demanding that they hand over their jewellery.
Sexual assault or rape	Sexual offences (including rape and domestic sexual abuse) include grabbing, touching and sexual assault.
Theft	Consists of the unlawful and intentional appropriation of another's movable corporeal property that has commercial value, or of property belonging to the perpetrator himself, but in respect of which somebody else has a particular right of possession. Only moveable property can be stolen under the definition of theft.
Theft of bicycles	Occurs when somebody steals a bicycle.
Theft of crops	Involves the stealing of produce that belongs to another person.
Theft out of motor vehicle and theft from motor vehicle	Consists of the unlawful and intentional removal of parts, accessories or equipment that form part of a motor vehicle or articles in or on the vehicle with the intention of permanently depriving the owner of control over such parts, accessories, equipment or articles. This includes theft of car radios, goods left in the car or parts of the car such as a car mirror or a spare tyre.
Theft of livestock, poultry and other animals	Involves the stealing of animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, chickens and dogs.
Theft of motor cycles and scooters	Excludes the theft of bicycles.
Theft of motor vehicle	Consists of the stealing of a motor vehicle belonging to another person. If force is used during the stealing of the motor vehicle, the crime is classified as car hijacking.
Theft of personal property	Includes pick-pocketing or theft of a purse, wallet, clothing, jewellery or sports equipment, without the use or threat of force.

* If any force is used during an incident of theft, the incident is classified as robbery.

