



Policy on PNTL Programming Urgently Needed to Address Human Resource, Infrastructure and Equipment Gaps

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Table of Contents

Acronyms	1
Executive Summary.....	2
Introduction	5
Methodology.....	6
Key Findings: Human Resources & Governance.....	7
Key Findings: Infrastructure, Facilities & Equipment.....	12
Conclusions and Recommendations.....	15
Appendix	21

Acronyms

BOP	Public Order Battalion (<i>Batalhão de Ordem Pública</i>)
CFP	Police Training Centre (<i>Centro Formação da Polícia</i>)
COE	Special Operations Unit (<i>Companhia de Operações Especiais</i>)
CSP	Personal Security Corps (<i>Corpo de Segurança Pessoal</i>)
F-FDTL	FALINTIL-Armed Forces of Timor-Leste (<i>FALINTIL-Forças Armadas de Timor-Leste</i>)
FM	Fundasaun Mahein
IMS	Integrated Management System
MI	Ministry of the Interior
MPCM	Ministry of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers
OJETIL	Organization of Youth and Students of Timor-Leste (<i>Organizacao da Juventude e dos Estudantes de Timor-Leste</i>)
OPS	Suku Police Official
PNTL	National Police of Timor-Leste (<i>Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste</i>)
TLPDP	Timor-Leste Police Development Program
UEP	Special Police Unit (<i>Unidade Especial Polícia</i>)
UPM	Maritime Police Unit (<i>Unidade Polícia Marítima</i>)
UPF	Border Patrol Unit (<i>Unidade Patrulhamento Fronteira</i>)

Executive Summary

The National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) is a vital institution tasked with maintaining law and order across the country. This report assesses the current state of PNTL organisation and operations, focusing on key areas such as human resources, infrastructure and equipment. Using qualitative methods, the research explores how resources are allocated and managed within PNTL, drawing on direct insights gathered from PNTL personnel and other key stakeholders. Structured interviews were conducted by Fundasaun Mahein (FM) researchers between March and May 2024 with key informants, including commanders and officers from PNTL headquarters, as well as from municipal posts and squads in Aileu, Bobonaro and Dili. A former government minister was also interviewed. These discussions provided valuable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities within the institution.

Regarding human resources, **many police posts are facing significant understaffing, especially at the municipal and sub-municipal levels.** Furthermore, PNTL's recruitment of new officers has not kept pace with the expanding demands of policing in Timor-Leste. The lack of regular recruitment means that PNTL personnel often reach old age before being promoted to senior positions within major divisions. The research also revealed that the training programs currently available to PNTL officers are sporadic and insufficient. These programs do not adequately address the evolving challenges officers face, such as crisis management, leadership development or community engagement.

Regarding police infrastructure, the research revealed a major disparity between urban and rural areas. While urban centres like Dili benefit from better facilities, **many rural police stations are operating with outdated and inadequate infrastructure.** This disparity is particularly evident in detention facilities, such as those in Laulara, Aileu municipality, which are poorly maintained and pose both security risks and operational challenges. There is an urgent need to rehabilitate these facilities to ensure that police operations can be carried out safely and efficiently. Furthermore, despite the capital city police building being operational for 24 years, no modifications have been made to address changing operational needs. Currently, the construction and equipment procurement are handled by separate companies, which creates fragmented project coordination.

Equipment shortages are another critical issue affecting PNTL's performance. Essential tools such as radios, vehicles and protective gear are either outdated or in limited supply. There are significant delays in equipment maintenance, largely due to an overly centralized and bureaucratic maintenance system that creates inefficiencies in repair and replacement processes.

Discipline and accountability within PNTL have also been inconsistent, with enforcement of disciplinary measures varying significantly across different posts. This inconsistency not only undermines officer morale but also impacts professionalism within the force. The research highlighted that a more transparent and consistent disciplinary framework is needed to maintain standards and promote accountability and responsibility among officers.

Moreover, **officers approaching retirement face significant challenges due to a lack of adequate support.** Many of them experience uncertainty about their future, which impacts their morale as they near the end of their service. There is a need for programs that offer financial

planning, recognition of service and reintegration support to ensure that retired officers can transition with dignity and maintain their well-being after their service ends.

In addition to these operational challenges, **the research also identified systemic gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment** within PNTL as a critical issue that needs urgent attention. Female officers often face discrimination in recruitment, promotions, and daily interactions, which limits their opportunities and professional development. Moreover, reports of sexual harassment within the force are frequently underreported and inadequately addressed. Tackling these issues will require comprehensive gender-sensitive reforms, including the implementation of clear policies, training programs on gender equality and harassment prevention, and stronger mechanisms for reporting and addressing complaints.

Finally, FM's research findings indicate an urgent need to **depoliticize governance and personnel management processes within PNTL** – including recruitment, unit organization and retirement. Based on our observations during this and prior research, FM believes that politicization within the policing and justice institutions severely undermines their professionalism and credibility. The involvement of political entities in overseeing personnel decisions has created a system vulnerable to favoritism and personalized decision making, where officers' careers are subject to undue political influence. All subjects interviewed during this research agreed that personnel management processes must prioritize merit and competence over political affiliations or historical group ties, such as those to veterans or certain political movements. Depoliticizing these key processes is essential to restoring trust in the institution, ensuring internal cohesion, and enabling PNTL to operate as a truly independent and effective law enforcement agency.

In order to respond to these systemic challenges comprehensively and sustainably, FM believes that **the Timor-Leste Government must take immediate steps to develop a PNTL Programming Policy**. Such a policy should be developed through intensive research into current and future policing needs, which would then be used to design clear targets for investment and development over the short-, medium- and long-term. This policy would serve as a guide for ongoing reforms and investments aimed at building PNTL's capacity so that the institution can respond to policing and security challenges as they develop. The policy would ensure that reforms and investments are driven by institutional needs rather than short term goals of individuals. It would also ensure continuity between changes of government, thereby guaranteeing the sustainability of capacity development efforts.

In 2023, the National Parliament approved the draft law on military programming, which refers to the programming of F-FDTL. The law aims to guarantee the execution of the military component of National Defence, in accordance with the Constitution and existing laws. FM believes that a PNTL Programming Law may be necessary in the future, but recommends that the Government first develop and implement a PNTL Programming Policy, which may be sufficient to respond to the challenges identified in this research.

To address the specific operational and developmental challenges identified through this research, FM proposes the following reforms and investments:

- Human Resources
 - Implement regular recruitment cycles to address staffing shortages, with a focus on gender balance and retaining experienced staff. Recruitment should target individuals of productive age who can assume leadership roles such as department heads, unit commanders and municipal commanders.
 - Establish continuous, targeted training initiatives to enhance leadership, crisis response and human rights skills.
- Infrastructure
 - Prioritize the renovation of outdated facilities, especially in rural areas, to ensure safe and efficient working conditions. Police building construction should include an integrated package incorporating essential equipment such as furniture, computers, printers and internet connectivity.
 - Streamline procurement processes to ensure coherent project management e.g. by eliminating the use of separate companies for construction and equipment procurement.
 - Empower municipal commands to manage basic maintenance needs to reduce delays and operational disruptions.
- Equipment
 - Invest in modern communications systems, expand the vehicle fleet and provide adequate protective equipment to enhance officer safety and operational readiness.
 - Simplify equipment maintenance and replacement procedures to improve resource availability.
- Discipline and Accountability
 - Develop a transparent disciplinary system to ensure justice and consistency, strengthen professionalism and increase public confidence in PNTL.
- Retirement Support
 - Establish a structured program for financial planning, recognition and reintegration to ensure a dignified transition for retired officers.

By implementing these recommendations, FM believes that PNTL will be better positioned to enhance its capabilities, professionalism and relationship with the public, ultimately strengthening its ability to ensure the safety and security of Timor-Leste and all its citizens.

Introduction

PNTL plays a crucial role in maintaining law and order, ensuring public safety and promoting trust between the police and the communities they serve. Since its establishment as a key pillar of Timor-Leste's post-independence security framework, PNTL has operated under a mandate to protect citizens, uphold the rule of law and respond to various threats to public safety and national security. As Timor-Leste continues to develop in social and economic terms, the demands on PNTL have risen sharply, particularly in relation to human resources, infrastructure, equipment and operational efficiency.

Timor-Leste's unique geographical challenges, including its mountainous terrain and the dispersion of rural communities across remote areas, create significant obstacles for PNTL's operations. Geographical factors are exacerbated by other limitations such as budgetary constraints, personnel shortages and outdated equipment. Together, these factors restrict PNTL's capacity to deliver high-quality policing services across the national territory.

This research explores PNTL's current operational landscape, focusing on resource allocation processes, infrastructure and equipment challenges, and existing mechanisms for engaging with communities. By exploring the challenges faced by PNTL across several municipalities, the study aims to provide a detailed analysis of systemic gaps and offer recommendations aimed at enhancing the institution's overall efficiency and effectiveness, ensuring the safety and security of Timorese citizens.

Drawing on structured interviews conducted with PNTL commanders and officers, as well as a former government minister, this report highlights the critical need for reforms in recruitment, training and resource distribution. Addressing these urgent challenges is essential to developing a resilient and adaptive police force capable of responding to Timor-Leste's evolving security and criminal justice needs.

Methodology

This research employs qualitative methods to explore the allocation and management of resources within PNTL. The study gathered direct insights from PNTL personnel and a former government minister through structured interviews conducted between March and May 2024. The research targeted commanders and officers from headquarters, municipalities and squads in Aileu, Bobonaro and Dili.

During the data collection process, FM's research team focused on three thematic areas critical to PNTL's operations:

1. Resource Allocation and Governance: Examine the distribution and management of human resources, infrastructure and equipment across municipal and administrative posts.
2. Operational Challenges: Identify gaps in resources, infrastructure and equipment that hinder operational efficiency and community policing efforts.
3. Future Recommendations: Capture staff suggestions on improving resource management, recruitment, training and support for officer retirement.

The interviews covered a variety of topics such as recruitment policies, administration, staff training, discipline, equipment maintenance and adequacy of existing infrastructure. Responses were transcribed and analyzed to identify patterns and systemic issues, and then synthesised into a comprehensive report. By integrating the perspectives of officers and commanders at the field level, the research methodology ensured a comprehensive understanding of the operational landscape and provides targeted recommendations for responding to the challenges identified by building PNTL's capacity.

Key Findings: Human Resources & Governance

The current state of human resources management – including recruitment, training, deployment, rotation, discipline and retirement – within PNTL presents significant challenges that negatively impact its operational capacity. Addressing these critical areas is essential for improving PNTL's operational effectiveness and efficiency, enabling it to better serve communities across Timor-Leste.

Human Resource Allocation

Distribution of police personnel across municipalities and administrative posts is based on population and crime trends. Officers are allocated to municipal command centres, administrative posts and operational units accordingly. Suku Police Officials (OPS) are deployed to meet specific security requirements, such as patrolling high-crime areas and supporting community policing initiatives. These units are typically the first responders in underserved regions.

According to respondents, many municipal posts operate with staffing levels that are insufficient to meet the needs of the population. This mismanagement stems, in part, from the absence of a National Security Policy that could serve as a guideline for recruitment and resource allocation strategies. Often, resource distribution depends on the preferences of the Ministry of Interior and the PNTL General Command. Furthermore, a disproportionate number of PNTL officers are allocated for personal security (CSP) for government officials.

For example, Dili, with its high population density, requires 800-1,000 officers but currently operates with only around 500 personnel, many of whom are temporarily deployed or dealing with health issues. Recruitment and retention issues further exacerbate the situation, as delayed recruitment cycles and insufficient efforts to retain trained personnel have left many posts understaffed. A growing number of officers are nearing retirement, with an urgent need to replace them with younger recruits. In 2023, the Government reinstated 158 retired PNTL officers with the justification that they were needed to fill recruitment gaps.¹

Police personnel shortages have led the general command to violate regulations by granting annual or sick leave without proper adherence to the law. PNTL officers on sick leave or annual leave were often recalled before completing their leave due to insufficient human resources to support operations. This issue becomes more critical during international events or visits in Dili, where the PNTL general command must assist municipal PNTL units.

The limited staffing also results in a high workload for officers, who are often overburdened with multiple responsibilities, affecting their performance and well-being. In many rural municipalities, officials are required to fulfill dual-role obligations, handling both administrative tasks and frontline operations such as community policing and emergency response. For example, the research found that officers in Aileu and Bobonaro must often take on both administrative and operational roles, which puts pressure on their already limited resources. The size and remoteness of some rural jurisdictions also creates challenges, as officers deployed to small posts must cover large

¹ <https://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2023/09/04/the-recall-of-retired-pntl-officers-undermines-integrity-of-the-security-sector/>

geographical areas, leading to longer response times and further straining resources. Community expectations for visible and effective policing are rising, particularly in urban centres with higher crime rates, and PNTL's inability to respond effectively to crime is a significant source of public concern.

PNTL officers face physical and mental fatigue due to the lack of resources and high demand for policing, which negatively impacts morale and the overall quality of work. Furthermore, the demand of daily operations leaves officers with little time or resources for continuing training or professional development, limiting their ability to adapt to evolving policing needs and challenges.

Case Study: OPS Role Duplication

According to several respondents, Suku Police Officials (OPS) frequently face dual obligations due to limited resources and the increasing demands of law enforcement. For example, in several municipalities, OPS personnel are required to assist with both field operations and administrative support. In Aileu Municipality, OPS deployed in the villages are also responsible for handling daily administrative tasks at the local police station, such as registration and coordination of community engagement programs. In Laulara Administrative Post, officers assigned to rural patrols are often called back to their posts to manage tasks like report writing or attending coordination meetings.

OPS units are frequently tasked with overlapping duties related to patrol and emergency response. In Dili Municipality, for instance, OPS manage traffic and crowd control during peak hours while also serving as first responders to incidents such as road accidents, public disturbances and security threats. In Bobonaro Municipality, OPS units are responsible for border security patrols while also addressing local disputes and providing backup to neighboring districts.

OPS are often required to balance their security operations with proactive community engagement. In Cristo Rei Administrative Post, OPS conduct routine patrols in urban areas while organizing community meetings to foster collaboration with local leaders and address public safety concerns. Similarly, in Aileu town, OPS serve as both law enforcement and mediators in resolving disputes within rural communities, often without sufficient resources or specialized training.

In some cases, OPS are responsible for maintaining the resources they use. For example, in municipalities like Dili and Bobonaro, officers are tasked with managing vehicle and equipment maintenance due to the lack of dedicated maintenance system.

These dual obligations and responsibilities faced by OPS highlight significant resource constraints within PNTL. While OPS' adaptability and commitment are commendable, overlapping duties lead to significant operational inefficiencies and additional burden on personnel. Addressing these challenges will require increased recruitment, clearer role definitions and better resource allocation to allow OPS to focus on their primary mission of maintaining community safety.

Challenges in Recruitment

PNTL's effectiveness is directly linked to its ability to recruit and train personnel to meet the growing security demands of Timor-Leste. However, recruitment and training programs currently face substantial limitations, which negatively impacts officers' capacity and professionalism.

As mentioned by numerous respondents, PNTL's recruitment efforts are not keeping pace with current retirement rates or the increasing operational demands placed on the police force. As senior officers retire or transition to non-operational roles, there is often an inadequate pipeline of younger, qualified recruits to replace them. Furthermore, as the population of Timor-Leste grows and security needs evolve, the inability to maintain adequate staffing levels undermines PNTL's efficiency in addressing community security.

Another issue identified by several respondents is that during recruitment processes, PNTL often implements quotas for veterans or specific groups such as *Geração Patriótica*, *Sagrada Família* and OJETIL, which frequently creates unfair competition for ordinary citizens seeking to apply through standard procedures. Abolishing these quotas entirely would ensure recruitment remains fair and accessible to all citizens who meet the established criteria for membership. This approach could prevent favoritism toward members of special groups or stepchildren within PNTL.

Within PNTL, and in Timor-Leste more generally, one of the most pressing issues is gender equality. Currently, the representation of women within PNTL is low, which limits the diversity of perspectives and approaches in policing. In addition, female PNTL officers report that they experience sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination on a regular basis, which significantly harms their ability to fulfil their policing duties and advance their careers within PNTL.

Increasing the proportion of female officers is therefore critical, as it would not only provide better representation within the institution but also enhance PNTL's ability to serve communities. Female officers often play a crucial role in addressing cases involving vulnerable populations such as women and children, and their involvement can help build trust in community policing initiatives. Implementing targeted recruitment campaigns aimed at attracting qualified female candidates, as well as creating supportive policies such as mentoring programs and workplace accommodations, is essential to address this disparity. At the same time, tackling gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment within PNTL is also essential for retaining female PNTL officers and ensuring their ability to rise to higher ranks.

In addition to gender equality, PNTL's recruitment efforts must be oriented towards guaranteeing long-term sustainability. This means that recruitment planning should not only aim to fill current vacancies but also anticipate future needs based on the evolving security environment. Introducing cadet programs and establishing partnerships with educational institutions could create a pipeline of qualified candidates who are well-prepared to address future challenges. Furthermore, retention strategies should be implemented alongside recruitment efforts to reduce turnover and ensure the continuity of leadership and expertise within PNTL.

Training

Training is a cornerstone of professionalism and operational effectiveness within PNTL. However, current training programs are sporadic and insufficient in equipping officers with the necessary skills to tackle the challenges of modern policing. One of the key areas of concern noted by respondents is the lack of continuous professional development, which leaves officers unprepared for new and evolving challenges such as cybercrime, organized crime and complex community disputes. Without ongoing opportunities for skill enhancement, officers struggle to implement innovative policing strategies, which diminishes their overall effectiveness in both routine and high-pressure situations.

To address these gaps, PNTL must develop long-term plans for systematic and targeted training programs, focusing on all aspects of policing operations and management, including leadership, communication and specialized technical skills.

By promoting the development of leadership skills among officers, PNTL can ensure that its leaders are capable of effectively managing teams, coordinating operations and making informed decisions in high-pressure environments. Leadership training is vital for promoting a culture of accountability and professionalism within the force.

PNTL must also invest in crisis response training. Officers need to be prepared to handle emergencies such as natural disasters, violent protests and public safety threats. Specialized training in crisis response will enable PNTL to act quickly and effectively in emergencies, reducing risks and ensuring public safety.

Human rights training is also critical to ensure that officers understand and adhere to both national and international legal and ethical standards. This is crucial for strengthening public confidence in law enforcement and minimizing incidents of abuse or misconduct.

It is also essential to train police officers in writing structured and organized reports. This ensures clarity when personnel submit reports, enabling effective review by PNTL commanders, Committee B of National Parliament or the Ministry of Interior. Several respondents mentioned that many officers lack proper reporting skills, leading to poorly written documents. For instance, some investigation reports cannot be processed by the public prosecutor due to unclear or incomplete details. Similarly, intelligence reports and other documents often lack clarity, specificity and organization. Moreover, police officers who are promoted to leadership roles must possess advanced leadership skills, which includes being able to craft professional speeches and written reports with accurate analysis.

Discipline

Discipline is the foundation of professionalism and public confidence in any police force, and within PNTL it is critical for maintaining accountability and effective service delivery. However, inconsistencies in the application of disciplinary measures undermine these objectives. Disciplinary actions within PNTL are not applied consistently, which leads to perceptions of favoritism or inequity among officers. This lack of uniformity can have significant implications for morale, as officers may feel demotivated or distrustful of the system when they perceive that disciplinary standards are unevenly enforced. Moreover, inconsistent discipline can create an environment in which misconduct is tolerated, ultimately compromising the professionalism of the force and undermining public confidence in its ability to uphold the law. As FM has noted in the past, procedures related to the storage and use of police service weapons are routinely ignored, with officers rarely facing consequences. Unlawful police shootings of civilians have severely undermined public confidence in PNTL.

Some respondents noted that police commanders often tolerate one another due to shared backgrounds as veterans, members of martial arts groups or political parties. There have been numerous documented cases of leniency towards serious violations involving both high level and regular law enforcement officials.

To address these issues, PNTL must implement a transparent and standardized system for handling disciplinary violations. A clear and uniform process for investigating and resolving disciplinary cases, along with defined consequences for misconduct, is essential for ensuring accountability within PNTL. Ensuring that disciplinary actions are consistently applied will also strengthen public trust in PNTL by demonstrating a commitment to fairness and justice. By addressing these inconsistencies and ensuring a transparent disciplinary framework, PNTL can strengthen its internal cohesion, improve morale and enhance its public image.

Retirement

The retirement process within PNTL is an important aspect of workforce management that directly impacts the morale and well-being of officers nearing the end of their careers. However, current retirement practices do not adequately address the needs of retiring officers, resulting in challenges such as anxiety about financial security and uncertainty regarding post-service life. Respondents also noted that retirement within PNTL – like many government processes – has become politicized. In other words, retirement decisions are often driven by political agendas, either of parties or individuals.

One major example of politicized retirement decision making occurred in 2023 when the new government recalled 158 retired PNTL officers who had been obliged to retire under the previous government. While the Government stated that the officers were reinstated due to policing needs, many observers suspected that political interests were behind the decision. A factor which contributes to politicization of retirement processes is that the responsibility for overseeing retirement currently lies with the Ministry of Interior. Several respondents agreed that the PNTL General Command should be responsible for these processes, not the Ministry.

Along with politicization, another significant issue is that the lack of structured support for the transition to civilian life post-retirement creates feelings of insecurity among officers, which can negatively impact morale and performance as they approach retirement. This uncertainty can also affect the atmosphere within PNTL, as officers may feel undervalued or unsupported during their final years of service.

The PNTL Personnel Statute of 2022 lays out the conditions for retirement; however, implementation of this statute has been inconsistent, and additional measures are needed to ensure that officers are adequately equipped for retirement. For example, providing financial planning workshops and resources would help retiring officers prepare for life after service. Recognizing the contributions of retired officers through formal ceremonies, awards or other forms of acknowledgment would reinforce their sense of value and respect within the organization. Moreover, implementing reintegration initiatives that assist retired officers in finding alternative employment, pursuing further education or engaging in community roles would help maintain their social and economic well-being. By addressing the challenges of early retirement and providing structured support, PNTL can enhance the morale of its personnel, demonstrate respect for their service and improve the institution's reputation as a professional and compassionate organization.

Key Findings: Infrastructure, Facilities & Equipment

Inadequate Infrastructure and Facilities

During interviews as well as site visits, FM observed that the quality of police infrastructure varies significantly across municipal commands and administrative posts. Urban areas like Dili have relatively better facilities compared to rural posts in areas such as Aileu or Bobonaro, where some administrative posts still operate in outdated and inadequate buildings. For example, many rural police station buildings have broken doors and windows, which compromises both safety and comfort. Sanitation facilities are often inadequate, making it difficult for officers to maintain a hygienic work environment. In Bobonaro, the police station structure resembled a warehouse rather than a functional police facility. One factor contributing to this oversight is the lack of involvement of PNTL during planning, which often results in designs which are not suitable for specialized policing needs.

Transportation resources such as vehicles and motorcycles are allocated based on terrain and operational needs, but many vehicles are outdated and essential maintenance is often delayed due to budget constraints and an overly bureaucratic and centralized maintenance process, with significant impacts for operational effectiveness.

Respondents noted that detention facilities in police stations are often in poor condition, which poses risks to both detainees and officers. Many of these facilities lack basic safety features and are not adequately equipped to meet minimum standards. For example, many detention cells have defective locks, making it difficult to secure detainees effectively. In addition, deteriorating walls and poor construction create risks for detainees and visitors alike, as well as potential escape routes for detainees. One municipal commander stated that many construction projects lack a proper BOQ, resulting in subpar infrastructure and risks to police, detainees and family members. These findings indicate an urgent need for proper planning and oversight to prevent the police from continually bearing the consequences of inadequate construction practices.

Respondents repeatedly acknowledged the critical need to rehabilitate police infrastructure in order to improve operational efficiency and provide adequate working conditions for its personnel. Infrastructure rehabilitation has been included in PNTL's strategic and annual planning processes, with a focus on renovating police stations, administrative posts and detention facilities, particularly in rural and underserved areas. However, limited financial resources often delay or prevent the full implementation of these projects. Competing priorities within the national budget further complicate the allocation of resources for infrastructure improvements. In addition, centralized decision-making and lengthy procurement processes hinder the timely execution of rehabilitation projects.

Modernizing PNTL's facilities would create better working conditions for officers, boosting morale and productivity. Improved buildings with appropriate safety features, sanitation and adequate space would also enhance operational readiness and enable more effective policing and community engagement. A well-maintained police infrastructure would strengthen the Timorese

public's confidence in PNTL by demonstrating professionalism and responsiveness to community needs.

Case Study – Poor Detention Facilities in Laulara

The detention facility at the police station in Laulara, Aileu municipality, is a prime example of poor conditions of police holding cells. Broken doors and inadequate ventilation make the cells unsuitable for safely housing individuals, while also posing significant security concerns due to increased risk of escape. These deficiencies seriously endanger public safety and undermine PNTL's ability to enforce criminal laws effectively.

The poor state of detention facilities creates additional operational challenges for PNTL, as officers are forced to divert resources to monitor detainees, which detracts from other important tasks. Furthermore, the substandard conditions can damage the public's confidence in PNTL, raising questions about the professionalism and capacity of the force. Sub-standard or inhumane detention facilities are also a serious human rights violation under international human rights conventions of which Timor-Leste is a signatory, notably the so-called "Nelson Mandela Rules" on the treatment of prisoners.² It is therefore essential to rehabilitate detention facilities both to improve security and operational efficiency, and guarantee that Timor-Leste fulfils its human rights obligations.

Inadequate Supply of Essential Equipment

Essential tools like radios, protective gear and weapons are distributed to squads, though shortages and poor quality equipment remain as a common challenge. Urban squads generally receive more equipment than rural posts due to the former's larger population and consequent increased policing needs. Digital tools, such as the Integrated Management System (IMS), are used in some municipalities to centralize operational reports and improve communication, but rural areas often face internet connectivity issues and technical difficulties.

Many communication tools, such as radios, are either outdated or non-functional, particularly in rural posts. This forces officers to rely on personal cell phones for communication, which incurs personal costs and reduces efficiency in emergencies. Officers report that they must often use their own "pulsa" (phone credit) to maintain regular contact with other officers and police posts, which creates serious operational challenges at times when credit has run out.

Furthermore, PNTL faces a lack of essential protective equipment, such as body armor and helmets, which puts officers at higher risk during confrontations and emergencies. Addressing these equipment shortages is critical for improving operational capacity and ensuring officer safety.

Respondents also reported that the fleet of operational vehicles is insufficient, with many municipal posts relying on aging vehicles that are prone to frequent breakdowns. This limitation makes it difficult for rural posts to patrol large jurisdictions effectively.

² <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/70/175>

Maintenance and Replacement Process

The maintenance and replacement of essential equipment within PNTL are hampered by inefficiencies in the centralized system. These delays have a direct impact on the operational readiness of the force.

The centralized maintenance system involves lengthy administrative procedures that require multiple layers of approval before maintenance requests can be processed. This often results in extended delays for the repair or replacement of critical equipment, leaving municipal posts without functioning vehicles or tools for prolonged periods. In Dili, for instance, vehicle maintenance delays are common, forcing officers to share limited resources or rely on personal transportation. Similarly, communication equipment such as radios often remains non-functional for extended periods, compromising the ability of officers to perform their duties effectively.

The prolonged use of defective equipment can lead to increased repair costs or the need for complete replacement, further straining PNTL's limited resources. Persistent equipment issues can also negatively affect officer morale, reducing their ability to perform efficiently. Improving the maintenance and replacement process is essential for ensuring that PNTL has the tools needed to operate effectively.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion

This research has examined the critical challenges PNTL faces in delivering effective policing services across Timor-Leste, particularly in the context of its evolving security and development needs. As PNTL continues to be a key pillar in maintaining law and order and ensuring public safety, it is confronted with a number of systemic issues that limit its operational efficiency and effectiveness. These challenges are most acute in relation to human resources, infrastructure, equipment and resource allocation, especially in rural areas. Addressing these challenges is essential to building a resilient and adaptive police force that can meet the country's future security demands.

PNTL's capacity to provide quality policing is severely constrained by limitations in human resources. Numerous respondents reported that there is a significant need for increased recruitment, particularly in rural and underserved areas where police presence is minimal. The shortage of personnel means that officers are often overburdened, which reduces their ability to effectively engage with communities and respond to security threats. In addition, there are gaps in training and professional development, with many officers lacking the necessary skills to respond to modern policing challenges. Interviews with PNTL commanders revealed a strong consensus on the need for improved recruitment processes and comprehensive training programs that equip officers with the skills needed for community engagement, conflict resolution and crisis response. Furthermore, the hierarchical culture within PNTL, compounded by gender disparities in recruitment and promotion, gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, further limits PNTL's ability to fully utilize the available human resources. Reforms in recruitment and professional development, alongside efforts to create a more inclusive and accountable institutional culture, will be key to improving PNTL's overall capacity.

The research identified infrastructure deficiencies and inequalities as another major barrier to effective policing. While urban areas like Dili benefit from relatively better facilities, rural and remote posts often operate in outdated and inadequate buildings. These conditions undermine operational efficiency and officer morale, while also raising security concerns, particularly in detention facilities where deteriorating infrastructure increases the risk of detainee escapes. The case study of Laulara police station in Aileu highlighted the dire state of its detention cells, where broken doors and inadequate ventilation pose security risks and violate international human rights standards. While infrastructure rehabilitation has been included in PNTL's strategic plans, the implementation of these projects is often delayed due to limited financial resources, lengthy procurement processes, and competing national budget priorities.

PNTL also faces significant challenges in relation to equipment shortages and outdated tools. Essential equipment such as radios, protective gear and vehicles are either insufficient or in poor condition, particularly in rural municipalities. Many officers report having to rely on personal cell phones for communication due to non-functional radios, which creates inefficiencies and increases personal costs. Shortages of protective gear, such as body armor, put officers at risk, especially during confrontations or emergency situations. The fleet of operational vehicles is also aging, with frequent breakdowns making it difficult for officers to patrol large rural jurisdictions.

effectively. Maintenance and replacement of equipment are often delayed due to a centralized and overly bureaucratic system that requires multiple layers of approval, further compounding these challenges. Interviews with PNTL personnel revealed widespread frustration with the maintenance and procurement processes, which undermine operational readiness and reduce officer morale. Addressing equipment shortages and streamlining maintenance procedures will be essential for improving PNTL's operational capacity and ensuring the safety of both officers and the communities they serve.

As Timor-Leste continues to develop economically and socially, the demands on PNTL have increased, requiring the police force to adapt to new and more complex security challenges. However, geographical factors, budgetary constraints, personnel shortages and outdated equipment significantly limit PNTL's capacity to provide high-quality policing services across the national territory. This research has identified the critical need for reforms related to human resources, infrastructure and equipment, with a focus on improving recruitment and training, rehabilitating police stations and modernizing essential tools. By strengthening infrastructure, modernizing equipment, and improving resource management processes, PNTL will be better equipped to engage effectively with communities, maintain public safety and uphold the rule of law. In turn, these improvements will help to build public trust in PNTL's professionalism and responsiveness, ensuring that the police force remains a crucial pillar of Timor-Leste's security framework as the country continues its development journey.

To address concerns about favoritism in PNTL recruitment, it is crucial to ensure that the process remains fair and transparent, providing equal opportunities for all qualified citizens based on merit. The current practice of reserving quotas for veterans and special interest groups promotes resentment, harms operational effectiveness and reduces public trust in PNTL. By abolishing these quotas and adhering strictly to established criteria for membership, the recruitment process can be made more accessible and merit-based.

Similarly, politicization of the retirement process remains a significant challenge for PNTL. The current oversight by the Ministry of Interior has led to inconsistent implementation of retirement regulations and increased feelings of insecurity among officers approaching retirement. Shifting the responsibility for retirement processes to the PNTL General Command would reduce politicization and ensure that decisions are driven by institutional needs rather than external political influences. Moreover, structured support programs, such as financial planning workshops and reintegration initiatives, would help retiring officers adjust to civilian life, boosting morale and reinforcing their sense of value within the institution.

To effectively and sustainably address these systemic challenges, FM believes that the Timor-Leste Government should prioritize the immediate development of a comprehensive PNTL Programming Policy. This policy would outline the institution's core objectives and responsibilities, while setting clear, measurable targets for investments and reforms over the short-, medium- and long-term. This policy would guide the PNTL's capacity building efforts, ensuring they are responsive to institutional requirements rather than short-term individual agendas. Moreover, such a policy would facilitate continuity between successive governments, safeguarding the sustainability of reforms aimed at strengthening PNTL's capabilities.

In 2023, the National Parliament passed a draft law on military programming for the F-FDTL, ensuring the execution of national defence tasks in line with the Constitution and existing legal frameworks. While there may eventually be a need for a similar law governing PNTL, it is recommended that the Government first focus on formulating and implementing a PNTL Programming Policy. This policy may provide a more immediate and adaptable solution to the challenges identified in this study, laying the groundwork for future legislative action if needed.

Recommendations

Fundasaun Mahein offers policy makers and stakeholders in the policing sector the following recommendations which we believe will respond to the challenges identified in this report and enhance PNTL's operational effectiveness:

1. Develop a comprehensive PNTL Programming Policy to guide PNTL's development and operations

The Timor-Leste Government, particularly the Ministry of Interior, should prioritize the creation of a PNTL Programming Policy to address systemic challenges sustainably. This policy should define the PNTL's core objectives and responsibilities, establishing clear targets for investment and development across short-, medium- and long-term timeframes. Such a policy would ensure that reforms and investments align with institutional needs rather than short-term agendas, while promoting continuity between governments to secure the sustainability of capacity building efforts. This approach would guide ongoing reforms and investments in PNTL, enhancing the institution's ability to meet evolving policing and security demands.

2. Human Resources

a. Regularize recruitment cycles to address staffing shortages and align workforce planning with operational needs:

To address the persistent staffing shortages within PNTL, it is critical to implement regular recruitment cycles that align with both current and projected operational needs. Recruitment efforts should be planned strategically to ensure that the police force maintains adequate staffing levels to meet short-, medium- and long-term needs. Systematic research should be done to generate sufficient data which can inform recruitment planning.

Gender balance should also be prioritized in the recruitment process. The Ministry of Interior should implement public campaigns to encourage women to join PNTL and provide specific opportunities for women officers' career development. In addition, PNTL should develop retention strategies to ensure the continued service of experienced personnel. This can be achieved through career development programs, competitive compensation packages and creating an environment where officers feel valued and respected.

b. Establish continuous and targeted training initiatives to enhance skills in Leadership, Disaster Response and Human Rights:

Continuous professional development must be a cornerstone of PNTL's strategy to improve the competency of its officers. Targeted training initiatives should be implemented across key areas such as leadership, disaster response and human rights.

Leadership training will be crucial in promoting a culture of accountability and professionalism within the force. Specialized emergency response training will ensure that officers are prepared for natural disasters, violent protests and other major public safety threats. Human rights training will ensure that PNTL upholds both national laws and international conventions, while strengthening public trust and reducing the likelihood of abuses by police officers.

c. **Ensure that recruitment is merit-based and does not favour specific groups, including eliminating special recruitment quotas:**

The PNTL should abolish recruitment quotas for veterans and special interest groups, such as *Geração Patriótica*, *Sagrada Família* and OJETIL, to ensure a fair and competitive selection process. Removing these quotas would create equal opportunities for all citizens to apply based solely on their qualifications and merit, promoting transparency and fairness in recruitment. This would help prevent favoritism and ensure that all individuals, regardless of affiliation, have equal access to join the PNTL through standard procedures.

3. Infrastructure

a. **Renovate outdated and unsafe facilities, particularly in rural areas:**

To enhance PNTL's operational effectiveness, it is critical to improve physical infrastructure, especially in rural areas with limited resources and accessibility. Outdated and sub-standard facilities pose risks to officer safety and harm operational efficiency. The Government must give priority to renovating key police stations and facilities, ensuring that they are equipped with modern amenities, secure workspaces and adequate resources for officers to perform their duties. The renovation process should also consider the specific needs of each region, taking into account local security challenges and the specific demands of rural policing.

Planning should give priority to functional design of police facilities, so that they are tailored to specific policing needs and activities e.g. detention areas, secure storage, emergency shelters. It is important to involve PNTL members in planning processes to ensure that designs are aligned with operational needs. It is also essential to separate public areas from holding, command and interrogation areas, including providing safe areas to ensure that victims of crimes are not exposed to danger during investigations.

b. **Decentralize and streamline maintenance processes:**

To reduce operational delays and improve response times, PNTL should decentralize the management of basic maintenance of facilities to municipal commands. This approach will allow local commanders to respond more quickly to maintenance issues. In this way, PNTL will reduce the administrative burden on central management and ensure that resources are allocated more efficiently, while promoting ownership and accountability at the local level.

4. Equipment

a. **Invest in modern communications systems, expand the vehicle fleet and provide adequate protective equipment:**

Significant investment in modern communications systems is essential for enhancing

PNTL's operational readiness. Reliable and efficient communication tools are crucial for coordinating operations, sharing critical information and ensuring the safety of officers during active duty. Expanding and upgrading the police vehicle fleet will enable officers to respond more swiftly to emergencies and patrol remote areas. Ensuring that officers have access to appropriate protective equipment, including bulletproof vests, helmets and other safety gear, is vital for safeguarding their wellbeing while on duty.

b. Update equipment maintenance and replacement procedures:

The availability of equipment, from vehicles to communication devices, is essential for efficient police operations. Streamlining and simplifying the procedures for equipment maintenance and replacement will help to ensure that resources are consistently available and in good working condition. Implementing an electronic inventory management system will allow PNTL to track the condition of equipment, forecast replacement needs and ensure that repairs and replacements are made efficiently.

Specific actions which could be taken to improve maintenance procedures include:

- Implement daily inspections before each shift to ensure equipment is safe and operational.
- Develop plans that include routine servicing and repairs to extend equipment lifespan.
- Create digital systems to track equipment usage and monitor maintenance needs.

4. Discipline and Accountability

Developing a transparent and consistent disciplinary system is critical for maintaining professionalism and strengthening public confidence in PNTL. To achieve this, PNTL should establish a standardized framework for handling misconduct, with clear procedures for investigation, adjudication and sanctioning. A zero tolerance policy of gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment should be adopted, establishing clear sanctions for offenders. Regular communication about disciplinary procedures and outcomes will promote accountability within the force, making officers more aware of the consequences of their actions. Furthermore, regular audits of the disciplinary system should be conducted to identify any weaknesses or inconsistencies, ensuring that it remains transparent and effective. By addressing these serious internal issues, PNTL can foster an environment of inclusion, respect and professionalism both within the force and in its relationship with the public.

5. Depoliticize retirement processes and increase structured support for retirement

- a. Transfer the responsibility for overseeing PNTL retirement processes from the Ministry of Interior to the PNTL General Command to reduce politicization and improve fairness. Additionally, implement structured support programs for officers transitioning to civilian life, including financial planning workshops, reintegration initiatives, and formal recognition of their contributions. These measures will enhance morale, reduce uncertainty, and ensure retiring officers feel valued and supported, ultimately improving both the internal atmosphere and PNTL's professional reputation.
- b. To ensure a dignified transition for retiring officers, PNTL should establish a structured program that provides financial planning support, recognition and reintegration services.

PNTL should offer training on financial planning to help retiring officers manage their savings, pensions and investments. Reintegration initiatives should also be put in place to assist retired officers in finding alternative employment, continuing their education or engaging in community service. By prioritizing these retirement support measures, PNTL will demonstrate its commitment to the well-being of its personnel, fostering loyalty and improving morale across the organization.

Appendix

List of Interviews

No.	Name	Position	Municipality
1.	Fidelis Magalhães	Ex-Minister MPCM	Dili/National
2.	Chief Sup. José Soares	PNTL Operational Commander	Dili/National
3.	Chief Sup. Natercia Martins	PNTL Administrative Commander	Dili/National
4.	Chief Sup. Arquimino Ramos	PNTL Personnel Commander	Dili/National
5.	Assist. Sup. Carlos da Silva Adero	PNTL Planning Commander	Dili/National
6.	Sup. Emilio dos Santos	CFP Commander	Dili/National
7.	Sup. Damião Correia	Interim UEP Commander	Dili/National
8.	Sup. Eugenio Pereira	UPM Commander	Dili/National
9.	Sup. João Sancho Pires	2nd Municipal Commander Dili	Dili
10.	Sup. Sebastião A. Quintão	Municipal Commander Aileu	Aileu
11.	Chief Sup. Agostinho Gomes	Municipal Commander Bobonaro	Bobonaro
12.	Chief Insp. Alexandrine da Costa	Squadron Commander Dom Aleixo	Dili
13.	Assist. Insp. Paulino de Carvalho	Squadron Commander Cristo Rei	Dili
14.	Insp. Marcelina Barreto	Squadron Commander Laulara	Aileu
15.	Chief Serg. Bartolomeu Maia	Squadron Commander Aileu Town	Aileu
16.	1st Sergeant Pedro Mendonça	2nd Squadron Commander Remexio	Aileu
17.	Inspector Trindade Mali da Silva	Squadron Commander Balibo	Bobonaro
18.	Chief Serg. Olivio Alves	UPF Bravo Company Commander	Covalima