



CONFLICT PREVENTION AND DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION IN AFRICA: A POLICY WORKSHOP

SESSION 7 The Governance Requirements of Preventing Violent Conflict

REFORMING THE SECURITY SECTOR

Nicole Ball
Center for International Policy, Washington, DC

November 2007

Introduction

It is appropriate that this discussion on reforming security sector governance as one of the central elements in preventing conflict in Africa – or indeed anywhere in the world – is taking place in the UK. The UK is the ‘market leader’ in security sector reform, having begun to work on the subject nearly 10 years ago in 1998 and having been instrumental in the subsequent development of the concept.¹

The concept of ‘security sector reform’ gained currency within the development assistance community during the 1990s as it became increasingly evident that neither people nor the communities and states they live in are able to achieve democratic consolidation, poverty reduction or sustainable development without adequate security or equitable access to justice. It has also become increasingly evident that democratic governance of the security sector is essential to the achievement of appropriate levels and forms of security and accessible justice. The roots of most of the conflicts in the post-Cold War era (and indeed many of those during the Cold War) can be found in political and economic impunity – supported in one way or another by local security and justice actors.

Security and justice bodies that are poorly managed and that engage in political and economic impunity tend to be professionally weak and therefore are unable to adequately protect the state and individuals against aggression, internal subversion, criminality, inaccessible justice or human rights abuses. In many cases, these weaknesses are tied to the quality of democratic governance in the security sector. In consequence, politicised or ineffective security bodies and justice systems are themselves a source of the instability and insecurity that can undermine the capacity for development, democratic consolidation, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Therefore, reforming a country’s security sector implies increasing a country’s ability to meet the security and justice needs of its people in a manner consistent with democratic norms and sound principles of governance, transparency and the rule of law. According to the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), there are four ‘overarching objectives’ of reforming the security sector, which essentially constitute an ‘SSR agenda’:

- Effective governance, oversight and accountability in the security sector;
- Improved security and justice service delivery;
- Development of local leadership and ownership of the reform process;

¹ In assessing the UK’s role in promoting SSR, it is important to keep two points in mind. First, pro-reformers in civil society in the developing, especially South Africa, helped to define what came to be known as the SSR agenda by undertaking practical work aimed at educating security-service personnel, civil authorities and members of civil society on their various roles and responsibilities in democratic societies and carrying out research on ongoing political transition processes. Second, work on democratic civil-military relations in the transition countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union that got underway in the mid-1990s was another important influence. Nicole Ball and Dylan Hendrickson, HH [Trends in Security Sector Reform \(SSR\): Policy, Practice and Research](#) HH, Prepared for Workshop on ‘New Directions in Security Sector Reform,’ Peace, Conflict and Development Program Initiative International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada, 3-4 November 2005.

- Sustainability of justice and security service delivery.²

But what does reforming the security sector mean in practice? Do countries in Africa share these overarching objectives? Do the international actors who provide support for security sector reform in Africa share these objectives? How can one best to go about achieving the four ‘overarching objectives’ identified by the OECD?

Reforming the security sector: The view from the continent

It is difficult to generalise about the way in which Africans view the desirability of and prospects for strengthening the governance of the security sector given the large number of countries and contexts that are found on the continent. However, information from surveys and reviews of SSR programmes conducted over the last five years or so do allow some observations to be made.

An Africa-wide survey conducted as part of a review of security sector reform in Africa, Asia, Latin America/the Caribbean and Eastern Europe found an:

‘... inherent lopsidedness in the kinds of reforms that are typically attempted. For instance, such reforms tend to focus on a) on practitioner needs (anti-crime capacity building, professional training, peacekeeping training, etc.) rather than the needs of oversight institutions; b) the military rather more than the police (although this is being rectified) and far more on both than on intelligence; and c) the formal rather than the informal or privatised security actors, such as local militia, vigilantes, community selfpolicing groups, private security companies, etc. They also tend to be short- rather than long-term in focus (e.g. disarmament and demobilisation rather than proper reintegration and professional development)’.³

A number of African countries have held national consultations to identify the security concerns of the population at large. What is striking, although not entirely surprising, is the weight that people give to ‘non-security’ threats to their well-being. The government of Sierra Leone, for example, conducted four regional workshops as part of the security sector review to identify, first, people’s priorities for rebuilding the country and, second, threats to achieving these outcomes. The results are summarised in Box 1 and underscore the importance of democratic governance to African populations.

This suggests that the steps that many African governments are taking to improve their capacity to deliver security and justice to their populations will only partially meet the concerns of those populations. The first problem relates to who actually provides security and justice. Governments tend to focus on the statutory systems, but in most African countries non-state actors deliver a very large share of security and justice services. Therefore, it is essential to improve the delivery of justice

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, H [OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform \(SSR\): Supporting Security and Justice](#) H, Paris, 2007, p. 21.

³ Eboe Hutchful and J. ‘Kayode Fayemi, ‘Security System Reform in Africa,’ in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, H [Security System Reform and Governance](#) H, A DAC Reference Document, Paris, 2005, p. 71.

Box 1. Sierra Leone: Identifying a Strategic Vision and Threats to that Vision

Regional workshops identified the following elements of a vision for rebuilding Sierra Leone:

- Good governance
- Improved revenue generation and control of resources
- Improved social services
- Improved political will]
- Quality education
- Developed agriculture
- Improved infrastructure/communications

The workshops also identified the following threats to this vision:

- Lack of political will
- Institutionalised corruption
- Lawlessness/indiscipline
- Subversion/coups
- Bad governance
- Uncontrolled immigration

Source: Brig (rtd) Kellie Conteh, 'Sierra Leone Case Study: Local Ownership of the Security Sector Review and Transformation Process,' p. 90 in [*No Ownership, No Commitment: A Guide to Local Ownership of Security Sector Reform*](#), ed. Laurie Nathan, Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 2007.

and security both by non-state organisations and systems and by the statutory organisations and systems. Unfortunately, non-state actors are frequently seen by African governments (as well as the international security and development donors) as corrupt, unaccountable, subject to manipulation by local elites, and prone to violence themselves. While this can be true, similar problems plague the statutory providers. What is more, many African states do not have the resources in the short term to focus exclusively on statutory service providers.⁴

The second problem relates to the ability to address the quality of governance of security and justice providers. Here several issues arise. Even when government officials may see the desirability of strengthening systems of transparency and accountability but feel themselves constrained by the need to meet urgent security needs. Legislatures may want to exercise oversight of security and justice policy but not understand how to perform their oversight function or have difficulty in establishing their right to do so vis-à-vis powerful executive branches. Pressure from civil society may be muted because of a lack of expertise, resources or political legitimacy in the eyes of officialdom.

Efforts are underway within the continent to strengthen local capacity to improve democratic security sector governance. Research is being undertaken to expand the knowledge of how security and justice sectors actually function, including how they are financed.⁵ Cross regional learning is being promoted by the creation of regional and

⁴ See for example Bruce Baker and Eric Scheye, "Multi-Layered Justice and Security Delivery in Post-Conflict and Fragile States," *Conflict, Security and Development*, (forthcoming 2007).

⁵ See for example Wuyi Omitoogun and Eboe Hutchful, ed., *Budgeting for the Military Sector in Africa: The Processes and Mechanisms of Control*, Oxford (UK): Oxford University Press, 2006 and Gavin

subregional networks of practitioners (including security and justice sector officials) and analysts.⁶ Practical guidance is being developed and capacity building for parliamentarians and other officials is being undertaken.⁷

Additionally, some African governments have set in motion processes of change that incorporate significant changes in democratic norms and sound principles of governance, transparency and the rule of law in security and justice provision. The best known example is South Africa but even there the need to focus on implementation as well as development of policies that incorporate democratic norms and principles is evident.⁸

Reforming the security sector: the international perspective

The view from the continent is therefore mixed. There is some pressure for and official interest in strengthening democratic security and justice sector governance but there are also countervailing pressures. External support for democratic security and justice governance may, in some cases, help tip the balance in favour of reform. The members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee – the governments responsible for the vast majority of external assistance for reforming security and justice in Africa – have endorsed the DAC's security system reform policy statement and in principle subscribe to the four 'overarching objectives' of SSR listed above.⁹

As with African countries, it is difficult to generalise about the international community's approach to reforming security and justice in Africa because each DAC member is at a different stage in developing national policy frameworks for SSR and is pursuing work in this area in different ways. However, there are four trends that should

Cawthra and Robin Luckham, ed., *Governing Insecurity: Democratic Control of Military and Security Establishments in Transitional Democracies*, London: Zed Press, 2003 (chapters on South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and the DRC).

⁶ The first African subregional network, the Southern African Defence and Security Management Network (SADSEM) links fourteen countries in defence and security research and training that involves security force personnel, civilians in government, and civil society actors. (See <http://sadsem.org/>). Regionally, the [H African Security Sector Network](#) was established in 2004 to support and facilitate security sector reform, security sector transformation and security sector governance throughout the continent.

⁷ On parliamentary capacity building, see for example the website of the [H Africa Programme at the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces](#). Examples of practical guidance include, Nicole Ball and 'Kayode Fayemi, ed., [H Security Sector Governance in Africa: A Handbook](#), Lagos: Centre for Democracy and Development, 2004, and Hans Born, ed., [H Handbook of Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector](#), Geneva: DCAF and International Parliamentary Union, 2003. DCAF is also working on a parliamentary oversight handbook specifically for West Africa.

⁸ Laurie Nathan, 'South African Case Study: Inclusive SSR Design and the White Paper on Defence,' p. 98-99, in [H No Ownership, No Commitment: A Guide to Local Ownership of Security Sector Reform](#), ed. Laurie Nathan, Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 2007.

⁹ 'Policy Statement. Security System Reform and Governance: Policy and Good Practice', Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, [H Security System Reform and Governance](#), pp. 11-14. The DAC is made up of 22 bilateral donors and the Commission of the European Communities. UNDP, World Bank, and IMF have observer status and in that capacity have also endorsed the DAC policy statement.

be highlighted with regard to the engagement of international actors in security and justice reform.

First, none of the international actors active in supporting SSR in Africa has yet succeeded in mainstreaming the concept into its development work or its security-related activities. The UK has come the farthest, but even there, significant gaps still exist in terms of implementing its various policy frameworks.¹⁰ In most other DAC countries, the SSR agenda, as defined by the four 'overarching objectives', has barely penetrated the development assistance ministries, let alone the foreign affairs or security-related ministries. This is problematic. Security and justice reform cuts across the competencies of all of these ministries and it is now increasingly well-recognised that a whole of government approach to security and justice is essential if SSR interventions are to be effective and have a positive outcome.¹¹

Second, what *has* penetrated the minds of most governments is that the term 'SSR' has gained international acceptance and that supporting 'SSR' is increasingly considered to be highly desirable. In consequence, many international actors have simply re-named existing security-related activities 'SSR' without much, if any, consideration of what is distinctive about this agenda from a conceptual and policy perspective. It is hard to escape the conclusion that, while the term 'SSR' has gained increasing currency, it has simultaneously lost a significant portion of its meaning.¹²

In particular what has been lost is the democratic governance core of reforming security and justice – which is what made SSR different from traditional security assistance. This does not mean that the international community is unaware of the need for accountable security bodies and justice systems. It does, however, mean that, with some exceptions, the international community does not give adequate attention to the need for the management and oversight authorities and systems (including civil society) that form part and parcel of democratic security sector governance to be in place and to function effectively.

Financial management has been an especially important omission in this regard. In view of the increasingly well-documented gaps in financial management capacity in this sector in Africa¹³ and the resource constraints faced by many African governments, the failure to include the security sector in efforts to strengthen the capacity of the state to manage its finances effectively and accountably is particularly worrying.

¹⁰ Specifically with regard to Africa, see Nicole Ball, Piet Biesheuvel, Tom Hamilton-Baillie, and 'Funmi Olonisakin, [HSecurity and Justice Sector Reform Programming in AfricaH](#), DFID Evaluation Working Paper no. 23, London, April 2007.

¹¹ Ball, Biesheuvel, Hamilton-Baillie, and Olonisakin, [HSecurity and Justice Sector Reform Programming in AfricaH](#)

¹² In some African countries, the term 'security sector reform' is now applied to anything and everything related to security. Thus, the employees of DynCorps – not an organisation renowned for its devotion to democratic security sector governance – who are engaged in restructuring the Liberian armed forces drive around Monrovia in vehicles with license plates that proclaim 'SSR-1', SSR-2, wearing caps emblazoned with the logo 'SSR'. As one UK official who strongly supports a governance orientation to SSR ruefully commented about SSR work in general in mid-2005, 'It is virtually all train-and-equip'.

¹³ Omitoogun and Hutchful, ed., *Budgeting for the Military Sector in Africa*.

Box 2. Local Ownership

Local ownership means that national actors and institutions assume the leadership of and political responsibility for reforming security and justice. It means that national actors – including national governments and members of civil society – assume the responsibility for decisions about objectives, policies, strategies, program design, and implementation modalities. It does not *require* management of resources but will be enhanced to the extent that resources are on budget. It also does not necessarily imply local capacity to implement all activities, although national actors should be involved in deciding who will implement activities.

Third, one of the ‘overarching objectives’ of the DAC security sector reform agenda is: ‘Development of local leadership and ownership of the reform process’ and local ownership is central to the success of any institutional change (Box 2). Unfortunately, many international interventions fail to give adequate attention to local ownership.

Because many African states lack implementation capacity, their international partners assume that they lack the capacity to make decisions and assume the leadership of processes of change. Because governments – and indeed the state itself – often lack legitimacy in conflict-affected African countries, international actors assume that they do not have the legitimacy to make decisions regarding security and justice. They also confuse the capacity for implementation with the ability to make decisions. A lack of implementation capacity is often seen as an indication of the lack of capacity to make decisions on policy.

As one participant in South Africa’s defence reform process has noted:

‘...these are exactly the problems that SSR is meant to address. They do not constitute valid grounds for bypassing local actors. If the security of citizens in a given country is to be enhanced, and if the provision of security is to conform to democratic norms, then it is essential to build the capacity and legitimacy of the institutions and actors that comprise the security sector in that country.’¹⁴

Lastly, the ‘SSR’ concept had scarcely arrived on the international agenda when the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 occurred. The post-9/11 security agenda has set its imprint not only on security policy but also on development assistance and the broader instruments of development co-operation, such as trade and political co-operation. Not surprisingly, the post-9/11 security agenda has affected the allocation of development assistance, particularly in the US but in other donor countries as well. A study of 47 fragile states found that major US allies in the ‘war on terror’ received 90 percent of the military and police aid provided by the US to that group of countries between 2000 and 2004.¹⁵ Much of this aid closely resembles the assistance that Washington provided to developing-world allies at the height of the Cold War. That is to

¹⁴ Nathan, [HNo Ownership, No Commitment: A Guide to Local Ownership of Security Sector Reform](#)H, p. 3.

¹⁵ Adam Isacson and Nicole Ball, ‘[HUS Military and Police Assistance to Poorly Performing States](#)H,’ Chapter 13 in *Short of the Goal*, Nancy Birdsall, Milan Vaishnav, and Robert Ayres, ed., Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press for the Center for Global Development, 2006, p. 414. Ninety-three percent of the assistance to the ‘war on terror’ subgroup went to Afghanistan and Pakistan (p.415).

say, the emphasis is on train and equip, while assistance to improve the accountability of the security services and their adherence to the rule of law is of essentially no concern.

The focus on counter-terrorism in the security policies and programs of OECD countries has placed the SSR agenda under considerable pressure. In particular, the pressure on countries receiving assistance from the major 'war on terror' actors to reshape their security services – especially intelligence services and internal security bodies – to meet the demands of the 'war on terror' is elevating operational effectiveness above the development of democratic accountability and oversight mechanisms. Combined with the various reasons why governments receiving this assistance have for not focusing on strengthening the democratic governance of the security and justice sector, this produces a powerful disincentive to a governance-based approach to reforming security.

One last point is important here. In terms of official support for significant improvements in democratic security and justice governance, the role of China cannot be ignored. China is increasingly active in the continent and the financial support it offers comes without governance strings attached. This makes it attractive to many African governments, and runs a very strong risk of undermining nascent efforts to strengthen democratic security and justice sector governance. While OECD governments may not provide adequate or appropriate support to democratic governance of the security and justice sector, the concept of democratic accountability is essentially alien to the Chinese government. Not only will governments not be pressured to be more transparent and accountable but China is unlikely to provide the sort of support that at least some OECD governments have provided to civil society and parliaments.

Reforming the security sector: refocusing on democratic governance

A governance approach to security and justice reform is essential for conflict prevention in Africa.

'There are many ways of providing physical security. One of these is by creating security services mandated to use force to protect the state and its population. It is important for every society to ask if it needs security organisations and if so, what kind of security organisations should be created and how will these security organisations be governed?'

'It is particularly important for African countries to ask these questions because since the beginning of the colonial period, African security organisations have frequently been a cause of insecurity for both the state and its population, rather than a means of guaranteeing individual and collective security. African governments have often failed to abide by the rule of law in their relations with their neighbours or their own population. Many of sub-Saharan Africa's recent wars have their roots in élite attempts to protect their privileged position

domestically or to undermine other African governments whose foreign policies are viewed as injurious to the ability of these élites to remain in power'.¹⁶

What this suggests is that reforming security and justice needs to be approached as an integral part of reforming African institutions of governance and fostering democratisation processes. But what does this mean in practice?

Perhaps it is easiest to start with a few examples of what it does *not* mean.

Approaching security and justice reform as an integral part of reforming institutions and fostering democratisation does *not* mean that public expenditure reviews should include a 'professional assessment of security services spending.'¹⁷ Since the end of the Cold War, development donors have been preoccupied by the amount of money that aid recipients spend on their security services. Development donors are convinced that governments are wasting money that could be better used for promoting development on their security services. Therefore, development donors want to know whether that expenditure is really necessary, or whether it is 'excessive'.¹⁸

It is not, however, up to development donors or anyone in the international community to determine what level of expenditure on security is appropriate for a given country. There is no doubt that there are inefficiencies and inappropriate expenditures in the security budgets of countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East just as there are inefficiencies and inappropriate expenditures in the security budgets of OECD countries. The question is how to go about removing these.

What is needed is that the appropriate systems of financial management are put in place so that:

- The security and justice sector is required to compete on a level playing field with all other governmental sectors for resources.
- All relevant stakeholders (including finance ministries, legislatures and civil society) are able to have input into the decision-making process.
- Budgets are prepared against agreed policies and strategies.
- It is possible to verify whether money is used in the amounts and for the purposes intended and deviations can be identified and corrected.

Similarly, approaching security and justice reform as an integral part of reforming governance and strengthening democratic processes does *not* mean integrating

¹⁶ Ball and Fayemi, ed., [HSecurity Sector Governance in Africa: A Handbook](#)H, p. 1.

¹⁷ Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and Robert Picciotto, 'Concept Paper,' Conflict Prevention and Development Cooperation, Joint Project of JICA and UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, May 28, 2007, p. 6.

¹⁸ Michael Brzoska, *Development Donors and the Concept of Security Sector Reform*, Occasional Paper no. 4, Geneva: DCAF, 2003, [Hhttp://www.dcaf.ch/publications/kms/details.cfm?ord279=title&q279=Brzoska&lng=en&id=18353&nav1=4H](http://www.dcaf.ch/publications/kms/details.cfm?ord279=title&q279=Brzoska&lng=en&id=18353&nav1=4H), especially pp. 5-10.

‘security sector reform’ into ‘poverty reduction strategy papers.’¹⁹ As explained above, ‘security sector reform’ is a concept of dubious value. It is primarily a donor construct that means whatever anyone wants it to mean.²⁰ The ‘poverty reduction strategy paper’ is similarly a donor construct. Producing a poverty reduction strategy paper is a hoop that governments of very poor countries need to jump through in order to release funding from the World Bank and other major donors. What is more, developing poverty reduction strategies generally occurs on a timetable that does not allow broad-based agreement to develop, or even agreement within government on objectives and priorities.

In contrast, incorporating issues pertaining to the accountable and sustainable provision of security and justice into a government’s approach to reducing poverty and promoting development has the potential to help create agreement within society on desired outcomes and the priority actions that need to be undertaken to achieve them. It would, however, be essential that this be done in a participatory manner, within a timeframe that reflected the capacities and political realities of the country in question.

As these two brief examples suggest, making security and justice reform an integral part of reforming governance and strengthening democratic processes will require significant changes in the way that the international community approaches not only ‘SSR’ but also its relations with aid recipients.

1. It will require external actors to accept and implement the concept of local ownership.

- One implication of this is the need to accepting the fact that the timeline for their engagement will lengthen. Local actors (official and civil society) will drive the reform process and it is their timeline that is relevant. External actors should be prepared to engage over the longer term.
- Another implication is that external actors must be modest in their expectations. They cannot address and ameliorate all aspects of a partner country’s security and justice development, and their engagement will not be the decisive factor in promoting sustainable change.
- Equally important, external actors cannot undertake activities for partner countries and expect sustainable outcomes. ‘Learning by doing’ is essential.

2. It will also require donor governments to adopt a whole of government approach to security and justice reform.

- This will require political/diplomatic, security, and development actors to develop a shared analysis of needs in partner countries.

¹⁹ Fukuda-Parr and Picciotto, ‘Concept Paper,’ p. 6.

²⁰ That said, there are those outside OECD countries who find the concept useful because it provides a way of looking across the security and justice sector and identifying priority needs for change. There are others who prefer to focus on the component parts of the ‘SSR’ strategy and discuss ‘security sector governance’ or ‘creating effective security and justice providers’. For a useful summary of critiques of the concept, see Brzoska, *Development Donors and the Concept of Security Sector Reform*.

- At times this will require political and diplomatic considerations to play a leading role, with Ambassadors and senior officials from headquarters at the forefront explaining their government's approach to their national counterparts. Thereafter, the message will need to be continuously repeated and followed up by all of the donor's in-country representatives, as well as those visiting from capitals.

Developing a whole of government approach is, of course, not easy.²¹ Development officials may understand the importance of supporting local justice networks while security officials may be focused on the state security and justice bodies. Ambassadors may not be tasked to develop a joint, country team approach while other departments and ministries may resist an ambassadorial lead. These problems must however be overcome in order to maximise the effectiveness and impact of assistance for reforming security and justice.

3. External actors should be strategic in their engagements, develop a good understanding of the context in which they are working, and prioritise their goals. Along with national objectives for security and justice reform (implicit or explicit), the shared analysis of security and justice needs developed by country teams at embassies/local missions and approved by officials at headquarters should form the basis of activities that external actors support.

To the extent possible, information should be collected on:

- security and justice stakeholders and their attitudes to reform;
- institutional capacity of these stakeholders (including non-state service providers), particularly the capacity to deliver services;
- justice and security needs of the end users;
- who currently meets those needs;
- quality of governance in the public sector; and
- financial and human resources available to support reform.

It is particularly important that external actors develop a sound understanding of the national political environment in which their support for security and justice reform will take place.

²¹ See, for example, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Whole of Government Approaches to Fragile States, Paris*, 2006, esp. pp. 18-19, and Nicole Ball, Piet Biesheuvel, Tom Hamilton-Baillie and 'Funmi Olonisakin, *Security and Justice Sector Reform Programming in Africa*, DFID Evaluation Working Paper no. 23, 2007, chapters 4, 7.