
From the Ground-Up: Governance and Security Sector Reform in Policy and Practice

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Introduction

On December 3rd, 2008, Rights and Democracy (R&D) and The North-South Institute (NSI) convened a roundtable in Ottawa, Canada, to discuss emerging issues in Security Sector Reform (SSR) across three countries in the global South.¹ The roundtable brought civil society experts from Haiti, Southern Sudan, and Indonesia together with policymakers from the Government of Canada and the United Nations as well as researchers from academic institutions and the NGO community. The meeting sparked discussion on the challenges to supporting effective, nationally-owned, accountable security-justice sectors and security-justice sector reform processes, as a means to improving governance and promoting sustainable democratic development in Southern countries. It also explored potential strategies for addressing these challenges.

The country presentations were based on research done by NSI and its partners, the Centre for Peace and Development Studies in Juba and consultants Isabelle Fortin and Yves-François Pierre in Port-au-Prince; and by R&D and its partner, the Institute for Defense, Security and Peace Studies in Jakarta. Each team sought to provide evidence-based, Southern-led, policy-relevant research that could help inform

more effective reform processes. The challenges, potential solutions, and directions for research identified below reflect the common threads among the presentations, as well as some of the discussion that emerged among workshop participants.

Challenges to SSR

In 2007, the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD/DAC) produced a *Handbook on Security System Reform*. Since then, the best practices outlined in the handbook have become the standard to which donors aspire in their SSR programming. However, donors, policymakers, and SSR practitioners face several key challenges in implementing reforms to promote effective, accountable, and civilian-led security systems, as envisioned in the DAC handbook. In general, donors privilege what is easy and visible, instead of what is challenging, political, and more difficult to quantify. Accordingly, they often prefer short-term, high-profile, and technocratic approaches to SSR. As a result, best practices—such as the integration of short-term programs into longer term strategies; a focus on system-wide approaches; coordination among donors and other national and international actors; effective monitoring and evaluation in collaboration with in-country partners; and, most critically, the promotion of national

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ownership of SSR initiatives—are not fully realized.

In some cases, integration of specific reform initiatives into a broad, holistic, and well-coordinated SSR process remains weak. In Southern Sudan, for instance, the transformation of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) has not been effectively coordinated with reform processes in other security sector institutions, such as police and prisons. Masses of untrained, often illiterate former SPLA soldiers regularly arrive at the police barracks to report for duty without the knowledge of Southern Sudan Police Service leadership. As a result of this influx of new recruits, increasing amounts of the police budget are spent on salaries at the expense of training and equipment, and police leadership does not have an accurate record of their force numbers. This in turn undermines training and recruitment planning. The new disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process, which is set to affect 90,000 former SPLA soldiers, has the potential to exacerbate these problems if coordination strategies are not improved. As well, important new regional players in SSR in Southern Sudan, such as Kenya and Uganda, are not integrating into existing—if imperfect—coordination mechanisms, and thus often exacerbate the difficulties identified above.

Haiti has faced similar challenges in integrating its different security and justice sector reform initiatives; in particular, police reform efforts have been undermined by corruption and ineffective linkages between police and judicial institutions. It is common to hear the police denounce the justice system as they witness people they have arrested and transferred to the justice system being released without answering for their alleged crimes. In this way, police lose motivation to continue making arrests, and in turn, citizens lose confidence in the efficacy of both police and judicial actors. The weak cooperation between the two

sectors has served to undercut steps that have been taken towards reform of the Haitian National Police (PNH).

Additionally, train-and-equip initiatives remain much more popular with donors than more political and difficult initiatives that promote accountability and democratic oversight. Donors note that train-and-equip initiatives are easy, immediate, and measurable, whereas political and institutional change is hard, takes time, and is difficult to measure. As a result, the accountability aspects of the holistic SSR paradigm tend to lag behind the capacity-building elements. Fickle political will among some security sector leadership for more substantive change and improved accountability compounds this situation. For instance, in spite of reform processes in Indonesia, the separation between military and police functions remains weak; in real terms, the military still involves itself in internal security matters, and civilian supremacy over military structures is questionable. Moreover, abuses by police and military intelligence services under Suharto have not been addressed, undermining civilian trust in these structures. The police in Haiti have also faced challenges with effectively vetting their forces; insufficient budget and a lack of transparency have undermined the process. Similarly, in Southern Sudan, support for vetting remains largely non-existent, and many civilians report that security sector personnel are a cause of insecurity in their communities. Part of the problem is that institutional cultures—for instance, around the Indonesian military as the saviour of the nation, or around the SPLA as freedom fighters who are above the law—can be hard to influence, particularly for donors coming from outside.

Effectively addressing gender issues in security sector reform programming has also remained challenging for policymakers and donors. The PNH, for instance, has found it difficult to recruit adequate

numbers of women into their service. While this is in part due to more traditional gender roles that tend to dominate in Haitian society, it also relates to a broader failure to include gender considerations in the reform planning process. Indeed, although there have been quotas in place to recruit more women since 2008, most women are stuck at lower levels in the force, and there remains a lack of institutional capacity to address sexual and gender-based violence.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, achieving real national ownership of reform processes remains difficult, particularly in contexts where gendered aspects of security are ignored and train-and-equip programs trump more substantive changes to the transparency and accountability of security sector forces. Donors are still unsure of how ownership might look, and of how to foster it. Broad-based ownership is tricky to generate; efforts to build national ownership often draw on individuals who might think like those in the donor community, who might share their technocratic approach. This kind of process can be limiting in terms of generating broader political will and engagement, as it excludes alternate voices. Moreover, donors have struggled with effectively engaging civil society in monitoring, evaluating, and supporting their SSR programs, which could be one way of ameliorating these ownership issues. In Indonesia, for instance, civil society groups have faced challenges in making themselves heard by government and in working together to achieve common goals; with effective support, however, these obstacles might be overcome.

Some Potential Solutions and Lessons Learned

Improved Coordination:

Coordination on security and justice issues is bound to be difficult, as these issues are political and sensitive for donors and SSR stakeholders alike. However, donors could do a better job in dialoguing with other actors, nationally and internationally. The

United Kingdom is making some strides in this area through its participation in the Joint Donors Team in Juba, Southern Sudan, where it is co-located with other major donors. Canada is also working to foster coordination and a whole-of-government approach to SSR programming; these efforts should be encouraged and accelerated.

Engagement with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other non-state actors:

Engagement with CSOs has been weak in SSR processes to date. This is a missed opportunity, as local CSOs could help policymakers ascertain how communities may envision successful SSR. For these assessments to add the most value, however, work must be done to better link provincial CSOs, who typically have better connections to a wider section of the population, and capital-based CSOs, who may have more access to information and policymakers. If they work together effectively, these groups could help improve national ownership over and participation in SSR, particularly if their results and findings are absorbed by government policymakers.

Linked to this is the question of how donors and policymakers might engage with non-state actors such as traditional leadership to improve security outcomes. Research in Southern Sudan, for instance, indicates that *Boma Chiefs* play an important role in community security, but there has been little donor or policymaker engagement with this question. Indeed, while working with traditional leaders could improve local ownership, it could also have costs (for instance, in terms of equitable access to justice for women and other marginalized groups). The tradeoffs and opportunities in working with traditional and formal systems have received insufficient consideration to date.

A Role for the UN: Facilitating dialogue with national and local actors

There is a potential role for the UN in facilitating dialogue with actors at the local

and national levels. While other multilaterals such as the OECD/DAC have taken the lead on SSR in the international community, the UN could serve to help link local, national, and international actors to both improve coordination and promote dialogue on key questions. These might include discussions about the most appropriate role for security sector institutions, and mechanisms for reworking the relationship between populations and the security sector.

In Southern Sudan, the United Nations Mission in Sudan is developing a mechanism that may fill this niche. Its SSR Coordinating Cell could help promote these kinds of discussions, as well as improve coordination among actors in the SSR field, especially if it takes care to integrate civil society and national policymakers.

Areas for further research and dialogue:

Discussions revealed that there remains significant room for policy-based research on SSR. Where research exists, it tends to come from international agencies. This means the research process does not typically reinforce national civil societies; contribute to national ownership of reform processes; or fully appreciate internal dynamics within institutions, cultural factors and other context-specific particularities. At the same time, civil societies in these three country cases are weak, especially outside the capital regions. As such, there is significant need for support of Southern-led research, monitoring, and advocacy to contribute to better understanding of SSR processes, and through this, better practice. Indeed, more research including time series data would be helpful in understanding how SSR processes and community perceptions are evolving over time, what kinds of SSR initiatives are working in which locations, and why this is so. To do this, effective measures of progress must be developed.

It may also be necessary to rethink the questions the SSR community investigates.

In some contexts, police reform may be more about generating employment for ex-combatants or at-risk youth than broader SSR and accountability issues. If this is the case, a different kind of research approach may be necessary to understand the policies in place, the most effective kinds of donor support, and the efficacy—and costs—of these initiatives.

There may also be a need for realism in donor engagement with SSR programming. Donor will and resources are limited, and greater attention may need to be paid to existing norms and structures in designing and executing more effective SSR initiatives. Indeed, although the DAC and other multilaterals advocate for a holistic approach to SSR, conditions (both financial and political) may preclude this. Sequencing, problem-solving approaches, or targeting SSR in regions where reformers are already present are strategies that donors have pursued in cases when holistic approaches have proved difficult, but the tradeoffs of more piecemeal approaches require greater attention and dialogue. Civil society and the research community could facilitate this investigation, and provide suggestions as to strong entry points to SSR that move beyond the train-and-equip paradigm that now dominates.

At the same time, certain limits exist in SSR programming. In Indonesia, for instance, the intelligence service remains outside of statutory and civil society oversight frameworks. A better understanding of these limits could allow the SSR community to engage with national level stakeholders to promote more substantive reform, and to generate the political will to support it.

For further information on NSI and partners' work on SSR in Burundi, Haiti and Southern Sudan, please visit www.nsi-ins.ca and www.cenap.bi.

For further information on R&D and IDSPS' work on SSR in Indonesia, please visit www.dd-rd.ca and www.idsp.org.