

Security Sector Reform in Developing and Transitional Countries Revisited

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1. Introduction¹

Security sector reform (SSR) is a relatively recent concept in state transformation, development and post-conflict peacebuilding. Notions of democratising societies, good governance with transparency and accountability, peaceful transformation of societies, human security and poverty reduction programmes have made inroads in security thinking (UNDP 1994; Commission on Human Security 2003; Ball et al. 2003). The people-centred concept of human security ideally complements, but often contrasts or competes with the notion of state security, or even more narrowly the security of the political elite. These conceptual changes in the security debate have happened primarily in developing but less so in transitional countries (Born et al. 2003).

Security sector reform addresses security problems and tries to improve the situation through institutional reforms. Security and peace are seen as a public good. Society as a whole, as well as its individual members, benefits from an increase in security. Security sector reform must be understood as a broad concept, which also entails a more efficient use of scarce resources to improve security. It seeks to align the contributions of military, diplomatic, development and security actors. Democratic, civilian control over security forces is crucial for the provision of security in the interests of the population. Democratic decision-making requires transparency and accountability. Thus, the public at large needs to be involved. However, democratisation is no guarantee of improved security. The fact that democratisation has so often been associated with rising political violence is probably no coincidence, since it challenges established privileges and raises political expectations that are not always fulfilled (Luckham 2003). Hence, the crux of the reform of the security sector is the development of both effective civilian oversight mechanisms and creation of institutions capable of providing security (Ball et al. 2003, 268).

The list of countries in need of security sector reform is long.² The reasons why security sector reform is necessary in each of these countries vary. They include post-conflict rebuilding, transition from military or one-party rule to participatory forms of government, recent independence, a lack of transparency and accountability in public affairs, a disregard for the rule of law, problems in conflict mediation due to an often conflict-exacerbating role played by actors in the security sector, difficulties in the management of scarce resources, as well as inadequate civilian capacity to manage and monitor the security forces.

The concept of security sector reform has become increasingly popular since it was first put forward to a larger public in a speech by Clare Short, then the UK's Secretary of State for International Development, in London in 1998 (Short 1999; Ball 1998). Its appeal lies in the visionary integration of a number of objectives under one intellectual roof: the reduction of military expenditures and their redirection to development purposes; security-relevant development; donor activities in conflict prevention and post-conflict situations; arms control agendas; and

1 This chapter is an updated version of Wulf 2004 in Berghof Handbook Dialogue No 2 (see McCartney et al. 2004).

2 Governments in developed countries have implemented reforms in their security sectors too. However, this chapter primarily addresses security sector reforms in developing and transitional countries.

improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of governance over those institutions charged with the provision of security (Brzoska 2003).

Security sector reform, sometimes also called security systems reform, has become a prominent “buzzword” within the international donor community. The intended reforms are meant to transform the security system into a well-functioning security framework. SSR is promoted by the understanding that an ineffective and poorly governed security sector represents a decisive obstacle to peace, stability, poverty reduction, sustainable development, rule of law, good governance and the respect for human rights. The underlying assumption is that responsible and accountable security forces reduce the risk of conflict.

The Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD/DAC) has engaged in recent years in offering concepts and guidelines for SSR (OECD/DAC 2007). Their studies include a rather broad definition of the term SSR (see below). The OECD/DAC definition emphasises that there are many sub-sectors of the security sector which reform can address. Quantitatively, the armed forces are by far the largest part of the security sector. Other potential sub-sectors for reform in which core security sector actors operate are police, gendarmeries, paramilitary forces, presidential guards, intelligence services, coastguards, border guards, customs and immigration, reserves and the judiciary.

Box 1

Definitions and Range of Security Sector/Systems Reform

Security sector reform is the transformation of the security system, which includes all of its actors, their roles, responsibilities and actions, so that it is managed and operated in a manner that is more consistent with democratic norms and sound principles of good governance, and thus contributes to a well-functioning security framework. Responsible and accountable security forces reduce the risk of conflict, provide security for citizens and create the right environment for sustainable development. The overall objective of SSR is to contribute to a secure environment that is conducive to development. The focus for international actors should be to support partner countries in achieving four overarching objectives:

1. Establishment of effective governance, accountability and oversight structures in the security system;
2. Improved delivery of security and justice services;
3. Development of local leadership and ownership of the reform process;
4. Sustainability of justice and security service delivery.

Source: DFID et al. 2003, 30; OECD/DAC 2001, II-35; OECD/DAC 2007, 21.

SSR is not addressed exclusively at the immediate actors of the security sector. This would be an extremely narrow concept of SSR. Instead, a whole-of-government approach of SSR is favoured (although not always applied) both by development donors and recipient partners – a notion that includes oversight bodies like parliament and legislative committees, the executive, financial management, but also civil society, NGOs, media, ombudsmen and customary and

traditional justice systems. In other concepts, non-statutory forces – liberation or guerrilla armies, private bodyguard units, private security companies, and private militias – are included and emphasis is laid on the role of civil society. SSR is sometimes seen as including disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants as well as initiatives pertaining to small arms and light weapons (SALW). In this chapter we will follow the broad OECD/DAC state-of-the-art usage, to discuss, first, conceptual developments and milestones (*section 2*), followed by practical applications of SSR (*section 3*) and experiences, problems and dilemmas (*section 4*). *Section 5* presents lessons learned and the last section draws conclusions.

2. Conceptual Context

The concept of SSR is a sub-theme of the wider security and development nexus, which has framed the debate on global development since the mid-1990s. Security and development are inextricably linked. One cannot be pursued without the other. This implies that violent conflict hinders economic growth and imposes enormous human, political and economic costs on societies and further deteriorates justice and security.

2.1

Civilisation versus Securitisation

A major challenge for SSR is to extend the process of norm-setting and programming beyond those states and institutions that are already signed up to the SSR concept – that is, to preach beyond the converted (Bryden 2007). While there is a general willingness to support and fund SSR, the best way to go about reforming is still open to debate. Some governments are more forthcoming in promoting SSR; others emphasise the political sensitivity of the security sector, especially regarding the reform of the armed forces and intelligence services, and are cautious in their engagement.

Box 2

The Historical Perspective

The present debate on security sector reform is not the first period during which development theoreticians and practitioners have turned their attention to these themes. Back in the 1960s – partially brought about by a large number of military coups d'état in Latin America, Africa and Asia – the development community was interested in helping identify an appropriate role for the military and the input of resources for the military sector. The debate focused on:

1. the *consumption or wastage of resources* by the military, and the issue, addressed in various UN reports, of whether those resources should be employed for other purposes;

2. *the role of the military in nation-building*. Development theoreticians put forward the hypothesis that, in view of the often artificial borders drawn up in the decolonisation process, the military might play a role in uniting people and building nations;
3. *the role of the military as a pillar of modernisation*. Anglo-American sociologists and political scientists in particular viewed the military as a key group for the modernisation and industrialisation of emerging third-world societies. In doing so they provided the legitimisation for extensive military assistance programmes.

What had previously been a predominantly positive image of the military as modernisers had changed by the late sixties, if not before, when the predicted rapid development failed to materialise and the military in many countries had become anything but pillars of growth and development. The more empirical analyses of the seventies focused more closely on the causes of coups d'état and the consequences of policies pursued by military governments. Development cooperation – primarily in response to the negative role of the undemocratic, often repressive and state-terrorist armed forces – proceeded to keep its distance from these actors. The role of the military and paramilitary groups and their absorption of resources came to be seen as a highly sensitive area that was too political.

Presently, existing reservations about security sector reform can be attributed to the fact that development cooperation programmes geared to the security sector have been viewed as support for the military. This aloofness from the military was problematic in that military assistance and other forms of cooperation with the armed forces in the third world were left largely or in most cases exclusively to the armed forces in the industrialised countries. These activities then took place in the context of the confrontation between East and West and the competition between the respective systems, the southern dimension of the East-West antagonism. The support provided by the USSR to third-world countries was founded almost exclusively on arms exports, and training for the armed forces or underground movements. Yet in countries like the USA and France too, where military assistance was declared as development cooperation, in purely quantitative terms military assistance at times dominated development cooperation. The focus was on military training and the supply of weapons, whilst the issue of what might be an appropriate role for the military in society in general received little or no attention. In both the East and the West, rationales were sought to justify this support for the armed forces, and it took the end of the Cold War to bring themes involving military and security policy back into the mainstream of development policy debate.

Source: Wulf 2000.

Over the past few years, the debate on security sector reform has gathered momentum within the international donor community, as well as in developing countries and countries in transition. Donors have recognised that a process of sustainable development cannot ignore the security sector and its actors. In the past, external support for the security sector was often provided or withheld for strategic and political reasons. In recent years, the emphasis among donors has been that sustainable development and peacebuilding must be based on strengthening governance in the security sector, in order to remove the barriers to the state's ability to provide security for its citizens as well as the threats to citizens' security. Compared to the high level of security sector

reform needs in many countries, the resources that have been made available are still far from sufficient. However, security sector reform has been accepted as a necessary condition for democratisation and development. In the absence of democratic civilian control, security forces are able to act with impunity – with negative consequences for both human development and security. Donors have recognised the developmental importance of security issues.

At the same time, debates on failing states and post-conflict reconstruction, and also the “war on terror”, have given rise to efforts to use development assistance for military and strategic purposes. There is a danger that development assistance will be “securitized” (Buzan 2007) or misused for military purposes. NGOs have complained about governments’ tendency to integrate them and their development projects into a military hierarchy, especially so in the so-called PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) in Afghanistan (VENRO 2009). Hence, a dilemma exists: will SSR lead to a democratisation of the security sector and thus contribute to development, or will development assistance be manipulated to function as a military “force multiplier”?

2.2

Milestones

Important studies and guidelines exist at the global, multilateral and national level and several multinational and supranational bodies and institutions like the OECD, the UN, the World Bank and the EU have formulated policies and concepts of SSR, mostly orientated towards developing rather than transitional countries (OECD/DAC 2007; United Nations 2008; World Bank 1999; European Commission 2006).

OECD – Development Assistance Committee

The Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development occupies a central position within the SSR debate and practice, as it decides what to count as official development assistance. Furthermore, it has in fact published several works on SSR, representing the state of the art of the discipline. As such, it is the discussion forum for formulating guidelines within the donor community. As articulated by the DAC, SSR covers three interrelated challenges facing all states:

- i) developing a clear institutional framework for the provision of security that integrates security and development policy and includes all relevant actors;
- ii) strengthening the governance of security institutions; and
- iii) building capable and professional security forces that are accountable to civil authorities.

The first of the three challenges focuses on the conceptual aspect (whole-of-government approach); the second is highly relevant for development cooperation; the latter of the three is a contested area of cooperation regarding the professionalisation of the armed forces. Through its Network on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation (CPDC) and with its handbook (OECD/DAC 2007), the organisation seeks better coordination among the participating countries and actors.

The UN Secretary-General's Report on SSR

The United Nations has traditionally been involved in helping to enhance or re-establish security, particularly in the aftermath of conflict. However, it was only recently that the UN began to engage in SSR, with a report by its Secretary-General.³ In his 2008 report to the General Assembly and the Security Council, *Securing Peace and Development: The Role of the United Nations in Supporting Security Sector Reform*, the Secretary-General states that despite the extensive experience in peacebuilding, “support for security sector reform has remained largely an ad hoc undertaking. The Organization has not elaborated principles and standards to guide its support for [...] enhancing or re-establishing security. It lacks a system-wide approach to delivering coherent United Nations assistance” (United Nations 2008, 1). However, a number of priorities are recommended which include: (a) developing UN policies and guidelines; (b) strengthening strategic advisory capacities; (c) strengthening field capacity; (d) assessing gaps and resource requirements; (e) designating lead entities; (f) enhancing coordination; (g) building partnerships; and (h) establishing an inter-agency SSR support unit. It can be expected that the UN will grow into a potentially more important partner in SSR support.

World Bank

The World Bank is only sporadically engaged in SSR activities. The Bank has emerged as a major administrator of DDR programmes for ex-combatants but is not a first choice for providing technical assistance to a member country's military or police forces. It can work with the civil authorities that manage and oversee the security services to strengthen their capacity for transparency, accountability and internal oversight. In principle, this could include ministries of defence, as well as ministries of finance and the interior, as well as central audit offices and parliaments.

Three present policy areas of the World Bank relate to SSR: the emergency response policy, its increasing emphasis on governance and its evolving approach to incorporating conflict themes into poverty reduction strategies (Ball 2007).

European Union

In its Security Strategy, the EU has recognised that security is vital for development. This approach to security includes SSR. In 2006 the European Commission formulated an SSR concept (European Commission 2006). The EU is engaged in SSR related projects in many countries. Priorities of EU programmes include the Balkan countries, Afghanistan (specifically in police reform) and Africa.⁴ On member-state level, the government of the United Kingdom has been a driving force in the promotion of SSR and has undertaken numerous projects in various sub-sectors in many countries. It claims to be the “market” leader in SSR. The Africa Conflict Prevention Pool and the Global Conflict Prevention Pool, now merged into the Conflict Prevention Pool (CPP), were established as a Stabilisation Aid Fund for ‘hot stabilisation’ countries. The purpose of the conflict pools is to provide a mechanism to improve the UK's conflict prevention policy and effectiveness

³ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has promoted justice reform for many years.

⁴ For a list of all EU civil, police and military operations see the EU Council's website: www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.aspx?id=268&lang=en.

through joint analysis, long-term strategies, and improved coordination with international partners (DFID et al. 2003). Resources are allocated to support priorities agreed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Department for International Development (DFID), and the Ministry of Defence (MoD), each of which contributes to the pool.

3. Security Sector Reform in Practice

3.1

Dimensions

A comprehensive concept of SSR addresses four dimensions: the political dimension of democratic and civilian control, the economic dimension of appropriate allocation of resources, the social dimension of guaranteeing citizens' security and the institutional dimension of professionalising the various actors (Brzoska 2000; Wulf 2000, 19-23).

- The *political* dimension: democratic, civilian oversight of the security sector forces. The core task of reform in this area is good governance, including the capacity of the civil society (e.g. media, NGOs, researchers, the public at large) to facilitate debate on security priorities as well as civilian oversight of the security forces.
- The *economic* dimension: the allocation of resources. The rational allocation of human, financial and material resources to the security sector is a precondition for it to function efficiently. Maintaining an excessive security apparatus deprives other policies (e.g. sustainable development) of scarce resources and creates an inefficient security sector. At the same time, an under-funded security sector cannot ensure the security of the population. Reform here includes identifying needs and key objectives, determining what is affordable, prioritising resource allocation, and ensuring the efficient and effective use of resources.
- The *social* dimension: the actual guarantee of the security of the citizens. The prime task of the security sector and its actors is to guarantee the internal and external security of the population. Security is not identical with security of the state provided by the military. Rather, it includes the security of the population from attacks of all types on their life, health or property.
- The *institutional* dimension: the structure of the security sector and the institutional separation of the various forces and institutions. The different forces can only be efficient and be held accountable if the various institutional tasks are clearly defined. An institutional overlap between domestic public security and external defence increases the danger of intervention by the military in domestic affairs. A security sector concept should not become an excuse for having militarised police forces or a major internal role for the armed forces.

These four dimensions underline how broadly SSR can be and is understood, if it is not only narrowly perceived as the technical or institutional reform of the security or the security/justice

sector but instead as a governance and democratising programme, as well as a development and security programme. It has been made abundantly clear in the literature that SSR is a relatively new area for development cooperation; in the past this was the prerogative of agencies engaged in questions of territorial defence (especially military assistance and police assistance programmes), while development cooperation largely shied away from engaging too closely with security actors.

3.2

Actors and Areas

SSR comprises all the state institutions and other entities with a role in ensuring security, including (i) core security actors; (ii) management and oversight bodies; (iii) justice and rule of law; (iv) non-statutory security forces and, in addition, (v) civil society. Thus, the security sector offers numerous entry points to start a reform process.

Table 1: The Actors in the Security Sector*

	Actors and Focus		
	Sector	State-centred	People-centred
Narrow Definition	Core sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • armed forces • police • gendarmeries • paramilitary forces • presidential guards • intelligence services • coastguards • border guards • customs and immigration • reserve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local security units (like neighbourhood guards)
	Security management and oversight bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parliament/legislature and its relevant legislative committees • government/the executive, including ministries of defence, internal affairs and foreign affairs • national security advisory bodies • financial management bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • customary and traditional authorities • civil society, NGOs • media • academia
Broader Definition	Justice and law enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • justice ministries • prisons • criminal investigation and prosecution services • the judiciary (courts and tribunals) • implementation of justice services (bailiffs and ushers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • customary and traditional justice systems • human rights commissions • ombudsmen • neighbourhood groups and crime prevention organisations • lawyers' associations • youth organisations • religious, ethnic or clan police

* For a different classification see Hänggi 2004, 6

Actors and Focus			
	Sector	State-centred	People-centred
Broader Definition	Non-statutory security forces		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • liberation armies • guerrilla armies • private bodyguard units • private security companies • private militias • vigilante groups

Institutions engaging in SSR should be clear about their vision (the broad or narrow concept of SSR), objectives (effective governance, oversight and accountability, sustained delivery of justice and security), strategies (people-centred with local ownership) and implementation process (with the broader security sector as the focus).

3.3 Objectives and Focus

The relevant literature illustrates that the potential areas for SSR support are quite broad. The overarching objectives spelled out in the OECD/DAC handbook point at governance and democratisation, at delivery of security and justice, at local leadership of the reform process as well as sustainability of justice and security delivery. The context in which SSR ought to take place according to the presently established norms and the formulated aims is summarised in *Table 2*.

Table 2: The Context of Security Sector Reform**

	Development/governance	Post-authoritarian	Post-conflict	High criminality
Key or primary problem	development/governance deficit	democratic deficit	security (and democratic) deficit	security and justice deficit
Key reform objective	development, good governance	democratisation	peacebuilding/state- or nation-building	rule of law
Specific security sector problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • excessive military spending • poor management • waste of resources • ineffective provision of security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • legacies of human rights violations • oversized military complex • oversized police apparatus • continued existence of intrusive domestic intelligence services • lack of civilian oversight structures • strong state, weak civil society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • legacies of violence • collapsed or weak government • weak civil society • displaced populations • privatisation of security • unintegrated ex-combatants • lack of civilian oversight structures • small arms control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high rate of criminality • organised crime • weak law enforcement • privatisation of security

** This table draws on Bryden/Hänggi 2005, 30.
The four types of society in need of SSR are in reality often overlapping.

3.4 Examples

Due to the broad definition of SSR there are many dimensions of potential relevance for development cooperation. Examples from a number of countries can illustrate what kind of SSR projects have been undertaken in recent years. Included are, for example, the support to the Afghan National Police by the international donor community,⁵ the assistance in building up a functioning justice sector in Kosovo or the implementation of anti-corruption measures and legislative and parliamentary reform in Indonesia. But also other forms of intervention, such as the UN-sponsored and Australian-led peacekeeping mission in Timor Leste⁶ are considered to be SSR projects. The OECD/DAC is particularly active in in-country SSR consultations in the Great Lakes region in Africa; the organisation has also formed an International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISSAT) to enable quick responses in case governments ask for support.⁷

Such SSR programmes vary widely in range and volume. They can consist of a handful of experts or advisors for a short period of time or can be as large as several thousand UN troops to protect a peace accord, as for example in Liberia,⁸ deployed for several years.

Given the fact that there is no agreed definition or coordinated concept of security sector reform it is not possible to give a definitive, empirically based answer to the question of the scale of reform needed. The present recognition of the need for security sector reform concepts has also led to re-labelling previously existing programmes under the heading of SSR. Thus, SSR projects can be found in almost all areas of development assistance.

4. Experiences, Problems and Dilemmas

It is very difficult to generalise on the nature and the required steps of security sector reform, since the respective political, economic and social conditions, as well as the regional constellations, need to be taken into account. The context in which the security sector is to be reformed is vital, and the differences in the various countries are as critical as their commonalities. Nevertheless, an attempt will be made here to identify a number of general conditions, discuss relevant experiences, problems and dilemmas, and draw corresponding conclusions.

5 See www.ssrnetwork.net/ssrbulletin/afghanista.php#paul.

6 See www.humansecuritygateway.info/documents/ICG_TimorLestesecuritysectorreform.pdf.

7 See www.dcaf.ch/issat.

8 See www.ssrnetwork.net/ssrbulletin/liberia.php.

4.1

Political Sensitivities

According to the OECD/DAC, donor support for SSR “seeks to increase the ability of partner countries to meet the range of security needs within their societies in a manner consistent with democratic norms and sound principles of governance and the rule of law” (OECD/DAC 2005, 11). Furthermore, the development partners are committed to SSR that is “people-centred, locally owned and based on democratic norms and human rights principles and the rule of law, seeking to provide freedom from fear” (ibid.).

Thus, SSR is a democratic and a democratising project. It has technical components (especially the institutional dimension with training and capacity building) but it is not simply aimed at making the security and justice services more efficient and effective. SSR is profoundly political. The reform focuses on the most sensitive sector of the state; power relations are questioned and vested interests are challenged. Support for SSR is an expression of the political goals (including the aim of democratic civilian control, the appropriate allocation of resources, the guarantee of security and the professionalisation of the security sector actors). Not all of these goals are automatically subscribed to – neither by the international nor by the local actors. On the contrary, as argued above, there is the danger that SSR can be used for military and strategic purposes that are often in conflict with the development agenda. At the local level, in the areas of governance, post-authoritarian, post-conflict and high-criminality situations, resistance to reform must be expected since vested interest are targeted by SSR [see also Michelle Parlevliet in this volume].

Consequently, an *apolitical* technical, humanitarian, development or financial support approach to SSR is impossible. Development partners must acknowledge that the politics of SSR – both the international agenda as well as domestic politics – are its most important dimensions (Nathan 2008).

4.2

Local Ownership

Local ownership – considered as a cornerstone of SSR – entails that the reform process is shaped and driven by local actors. The literature and donor standards have embraced this principle and look at it as a precondition for sustainability of the reform. The practice of local ownership in SSR programming suggests that external actors should support programmes and projects initiated by local actors rather than soliciting local support for their own donor-designed programmes and projects. In practice, however, the principle is sometimes very difficult to apply.

There seem to be two reasons why local ownership is deemed important for SSR: (1) to further the democratisation project and (2) as a means to the end of providing more effective governance, justice and security (Nathan 2008; Scheye 2008).

What is important for SSR in post-authoritarian, post-conflict and fragile states and societies with a high criminality rate is that justice and security are “scarce commodities and public

goods” (Scheye 2008, 63), not only in terms of how they are provided but also to whom they are delivered and what objectives they are intended to achieve. “Given that donor programming will inevitably create winners and losers, the important political question is local ownership by whom and for whom?” (ibid.).

4.3

Mainstreaming Gender

Violence against women is one of the largest threats to security, and a participatory approach to SSR can help ensure that the security needs of women are incorporated into reforms. As men are over-represented in the security sector, many issues that directly affect women, girls and marginalised men and boys are often neglected in SSR reforms. These issues can include the threat posed to the security of women and marginalised groups by the security forces, violence against women and the recruitment of child soldiers in conflict zones. The following types of initiatives can help encourage gender equality and women’s empowerment in SSR programming:

First, it is imperative to include gender and women’s issues explicitly in SSR programmes. It can be important to establish special units or desks within the police and justice services to deal with female and juvenile victims of violence, as has been done, for example, in Sierra Leone.

In many cases equal participation will require structural and policy reforms, as well as changes in personnel practices (recruitment, retention, promotion) to embed a systematic approach to the participation of women. Other reforms can include gender-specific budgeting, zero-tolerance policies for discrimination and relevant gender training. Empowering women to undertake positions of authority and supervision will change the dynamics of the reform process. Vanessa Farr (2004, 67/68) has suggested four concrete actions to overcome the lacuna of addressing the gender issue in SSR:

“(1) The scourge of violence against women, whether it is perpetrated at home or in public spaces, must be addressed as a matter of extreme urgency through legal reform and legislative initiatives supported by public education; [...] (2) Women’s participation in all aspects of political decision-making must be actively promoted; [...] (3) Women’s participation in all aspects of peace-making and security must be prioritised; [...] (4) The current male domination of the security sector, and male culpability in violence against women, whether as perpetrators or through passively condoning such violence, must be acknowledged and actions put in place to address and overcome its root causes [...]”

While SSR has caught the imagination of donors, it must be concluded that even after about a dozen years of discussion, programming and practice of SSR, gender issues remain a marginalised issue in this debate (Mobekk 2010). However, political and development priorities in many countries, especially the lobbying function of NGOs, give reason for hope that the gap between the general expectation of the need for mainstreaming gender issues and the lacking practice in SSR will – if not be closed in the short term – at least be narrowed.

4.4 Whole-of-Government Approach

To tackle the interconnected problems of weak governance, poor economic performance, insecurity and poverty, SSR requires a holistic approach. Addressing these issues has prompted responses from governments involving an increasingly complex range of diplomatic, development, humanitarian, security, trade and finance actors, instruments and interventions. As a result, the OECD/DAC has formulated the need for a whole-of-government approach in SSR. To facilitate such a process, the OECD/DAC has launched a series of thematic meetings in fragile and conflict-affected states.⁹

The UK government is most outspoken in promoting the whole-of-government approach. Integrated teams are supposed to “bring together technical expertise with the necessary political, change management, programme management and communication skills” (OECD/DAC 2007, 11). Resources should come from a variety of government budgets, notably defence, diplomacy and development.

4.5 Structural Problems

Domestic and internal initiatives to prevent violence and to provide security have to take the structural causes of these conflicts into consideration. Although police and military forces and their weapons in an unreformed security sector are part of the problem, they are usually not the cause of violence but an instrument in such conflicts. Hence, security sector reform is a subset of a wider political and economic reform. Ambitions to reform the security sector have to consider the underlying causes of violence in order for such programmes to succeed. To remove these causes of violence and wars confronting many societies, laying the basis for peace and development can only be a long-term programme. Security sector reform addresses mainly the symptoms of violent conflicts and aims at short or medium-term adjustments to facilitate the long-term process. Trying to reform the most important state instrument in the peace process is certainly a significant objective. This reform is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the long-term goals of peace and development, good governance, transparency and accountability.

The security sector is a politically sensitive area. Reform processes encounter serious problems and are faced with dilemmas, which require very close attention.

4.6 The Right Partners

It cannot be taken for granted as a matter of principle that the will to reform the security sector always exists or that governments will accept external involvement or support, which is after

⁹ From interviews by the author.

all a form of intervention. Yet this is a precondition for sustainable and systematic reform, and demarcates the limits of external support. The SSR concept remains contested on two levels. On the one hand, there is no generally accepted prescription of whether to apply the broader or narrower understanding of the concept. On the other hand, SSR clearly has British roots, which are viewed with suspicion by some states. In developing and transitional countries SSR is partly welcomed, while in some parts of the world it is seen as an imposition of western values, methods and approaches in an area that lies at the heart of national security concerns (Bryden 2007, 1).

Furthermore, security sector actors have often played dubious roles that might disqualify them. For instance, is cooperation for reform possible with the former military responsible for the genocide in Rwanda? Is the bloody history of the military in Latin America a reason to remain cautious about working with them even today, or to turn down opportunities to do so? Can cooperation in the judicial sector work with Islamic fundamentalists? Must it be discontinued with countries with nuclear ambitions, like North Korea? In many cases partnership in security sector reform will be more complicated than in other fields of foreign policy or economic cooperation. It might even be necessary to decline cooperation, for instance with a corrupt judicial apparatus or to turn down training programmes for the armed forces where there is a risk that direct military assistance may promote or legitimise activities that endanger human security. In cases of doubt, it is therefore appropriate to avoid working directly with the security forces. Nevertheless, there are usually opportunities instead to strengthen and support primarily those elements responsible for democratic control of the security sector.

4.7

Donor Policy Coherence

Donor policies are often not harmonised, but in many cases they are even diametrically opposed. Many international organisations that promote democracy as a universal norm do not necessarily adhere to these norms themselves. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are guided by the principles of their important “northern” shareholders, while at the same time imposing reform programmes on recipient countries to achieve democracy and good governance. Even the United Nations is not a democratically organised body, with many non-democratic members influencing their programmes.

The real litmus test in security sector reform for donors is the question of whether defence relations (especially arms export interests) are considered within their security sector reform programmes. None of the major donors seem willing to do this but pursue their arms export interests through their economic and foreign trade ministries and agencies, while their foreign offices and economic cooperation agencies are pursuing the security sector reform agenda.

Thus, foreign assistance in this area is characterised by a lack of coherence among the different donors and, in addition, within many countries between the different agencies involved in economic and development cooperation. This stands in stark contrast to the generally broad positive response to the notion that lack of human security is a fundamental obstacle to development. As a

minimum, involvement in security sector reform requires a strict application of the development criteria to “do no harm”.

4.8 Selecting Priorities in the Light of Scarce Funds

Policy makers have to weigh different relevant objectives – like poverty reduction, improvement of health situations, improvement of water supply, and many more – against the need for security sector reform. Measures to increase public security can require the allocation of large volumes of resources – resources that might be needed for other programmes. Given the scarcity of funds it will be necessary to set priorities. By setting these priorities it should be kept in mind that the security sector has control over the ultimate means of force. Hence, it is an especially important sector of the state. However, the general and valid assumption that security is a precondition for development is too broad to be a concrete blueprint for setting such priorities.

There are probably no perfect criteria for prioritising SSR in the context of other development programmes. Such decisions need to be taken on a case-by-case basis; they should, however, never be taken without the consent of the local authorities concerned, although this again raises the question, discussed above, of the difficulties of identifying who these authorised local partners are.

5. Lessons Learned and Caveats

The situation in many countries urgently in need of security sector reform is not exactly an enabling environment. It has to be accepted – although it is difficult to tolerate on moral grounds – that violent conflict and wars can usually not be prevented or stopped in the short term. Violent conflict has remained endemic, despite intense efforts, in a number of regions. The realities in many countries have to be taken into consideration. And these realities often mean that there will be no peace without a reform of the security sector. To expect peace to stabilise a society without touching the security sector is wishful thinking.

The engagement in security sector reform has taught some lessons to both the international community and the countries undergoing reform. Traditional military and police assistance programmes of the Cold War period have little in common with the requirements of security sector reform. Among the most important lessons learned by the international community are the need to acknowledge that countries have legitimate security needs; the necessity of comprehensive and coherent external assistance; the need to secure the commitment of national and local leadership; the indispensability of carefully designed confidence-building measures in overcoming the suspicion between the security forces and the civilian population; the necessity of a long-term perspective and commitment; the requirement to establish a civilian-led governance structure; and the danger of misusing SSR and development assistance for non-development purposes.

International and national actors do not always prioritise the same goals in security sector reform. To make security sector reform a success, it is important to consider the specific circumstances of a country, without losing sight of the overall principles and goals of security sector reform and the even wider goal of removing the causes for structural violence. It is important to constantly question what appears to be established wisdom, both specifically with regard to security sector reform as well as regarding international assistance more generally:

1. *The role of the military, police and judiciary.* While numerous examples of arbitrary action, despotism and political intervention by security sector actors can be quoted from many parts of the world, there are also occasions when the military has intervened due to the incompetence, nepotism or corruption of the political elite. Thus, the role of these forces needs to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Examples from African and Latin American countries illustrate that a weak and politically controlled military is by no means a guarantee for development. Moreover, ‘irregular’ forces, such as paramilitaries, which have no clearly defined role and operate outside of the main lines of command, are sometimes overlooked in reform processes.
2. *Appropriate civilian control and professional security actors.* The broad debate on civilian-military relations also has implications for security sector reform. An important part of SSR is to enable a civilian government and civil society, which often lacks professional military or security expertise and experience, to manage a professional security apparatus. Security sector reform can be most successful where legitimate civil institutions possess the capacity and the expertise to control the security forces.
3. *Political conditionality.* Democracy, good governance and human rights have been presented as a condition (not always in a strict formal sense) for economic assistance. Good governance, often in conjunction with other conditions (such as the implementation of structural adjustment programmes), has become a core value of international assistance programmes. Every intervention by a foreign actor is based on a set of assumptions – explicit or implicit, theoretically valid or invalid. If the causes of insecurity are misperceived, then programmes or suggested remedies might be inefficient or even counterproductive.
4. *Reservations of the development community.* It is recognised in development cooperation that security issues can no longer be excluded, as was the case for a long time. This recognition has not yet been embraced in practical programmes. Reservations about cooperation with security sector actors remain (often for good reasons). In cases of doubt, it is appropriate to avoid direct cooperation with security forces, and instead to strengthen and support civil society, enabling it to exercise more control of the security sector.
5. *Incoherence of donor policy.* While development ministries argue for a reduction in military expenditure commensurate with development needs, ministries of economic affairs and trade lobby on behalf of the arms industry. Similarly, while negotiations are underway on debt-cancellation programmes, arms imports are increasing foreign debts. Donors should practice what they preach. While the development community argues for a development approach to assist weak states or to stabilise failing states, global strategic vested interests of intervening powers perceive development aid and SSR as a non-military instrument for pursuing non-development goals.

6. *Turf wars*. Although cooperation among donors is a key concept in development cooperation, the reality often looks different. Competition between different international organisations, governments and NGOs, rather than joint efforts, leaves its mark on programmes.
7. *Re-labelling of traditional programmes*. The present popularity of security sector reform concepts can lead to an undifferentiated strategy encompassing almost all areas of economic assistance, amounting in the end to nothing more than a re-labelling of traditional programmes under the guise of security sector reform.
8. *Dilemmas of security sector reform*. A number of dilemmas have been mentioned above, namely in the areas of cooperating with the right partners, preventing gender issues from being marginalised, setting the right priorities and achieving donor coherence. In addition, given the economic, political and social constraints in most of the developing and transitional countries, a full-fledged security sector reform programme can mean overkill. A gradual approach, finding a compromise to fully engage local authorities and improvements in transparency that can be properly monitored would be more realistic.

6.

Conclusions

In order to overcome problems and engage the right people in a meaningful way it is necessary to use an approach that is aware of the problems but nevertheless makes use of the opportunities for security sector reform. Security sector reform will achieve little without a broader process of transformation of the society. But the reverse is also true. The political reform process will get stalled without a thorough transformation of the security sector. It is a process that goes beyond the civil control of the armed forces; it needs to be a process of democratic control.

While the reform process is still ongoing in many countries it can be concluded that countries have performed unevenly in security sector reform, ranging from fundamental and solid progress towards democratic societies including the security system, to single issue or half-hearted reforms. Sometimes security agencies are excluded from the reform process and the executive routinely deploys police or armed forces and a judiciary under its control against political opponents. Security sector reform, so far, also has a mixed record in post-conflict societies because the externally brokered and assisted reform has primarily addressed the warring parties with the most direct involvement in violence, rather than the forces advocating peace. Such a short-term focus has often been necessary to secure the end of hostilities. Nevertheless, it seems that fundamental changes in society, like a regime change or the end of war, are a solid ground for far-reaching reforms, while relatively stable societies are slow to seriously implement security sector reforms. An important conclusion is that the reform of the security sector is not regime-dependent, and democratisation is not by itself a guarantee of reform.

Of course, there remain formidable barriers to comprehensive reforms of the security sector: lack of the most basic civil institutions capable of carrying out reforms; continued authoritarianism;

continued strife, criminality, ethnic cleavages, warlordism and other legacies in post-conflict situations; lack of political will and commitment in recipient countries; budgetary constraints and last but not least the intervening interest of external politics and powers. Key shortcomings of programmes are lack of domestic ownership, shortage of resources, ad-hoc and piecemeal rather than holistic or comprehensive programmes, lack of coordination among donors, even reluctance among donors to engage in the security sector and weak linkage to regional initiatives.

Donors have expanded and deepened their engagement in security sector reform during the last few years, which is evident from the numbers and kind of activities in which they are engaged and their policy formulations. Nonetheless, it is not always clear whether the assistance that is being provided works towards a holistic and integrated approach to security.

The US-led anti-terror campaign has had negative impacts on accountability and transparency and ignores genuine security sector reform and good governance objectives. Rather, the aims are to strengthen the operational effectiveness of uniformed security services and intelligence in a narrow technical sense. Here the cleavage between concepts of ‘human’ and ‘hard’ security doctrines (the latter based primarily on military or police force) becomes most obvious.

Interestingly and paradoxically, while much of the international political and academic debate has addressed concepts of wider security (with a non-military or defensive focus), many governments, both in developing and transitional countries as well as in developed countries, have become concerned with ‘hard’ security. This is largely due to pressing local and international problems like organised crime, internal wars and gross human rights violations which seem to call for an immediate domestic or international military or police response, rather than a long-term reform concept. But it is also due to narrowly perceived military-based concepts, propagated in the name of stabilisation of weak or failing states in order to uphold vested interests of external powers. In part this is a response to a feeling that security sector reform in a broad sense does not necessarily address the immediate security needs.

Despite some critical observations and shortcomings of reform programmes, on balance it can be considered a progressive development that security sector reform and security problems are no longer exclusively in the realm of ‘hard’ security advocates, but now play an important part in development discussion and assistance. At the same time, it has to be clear to the advocates of security sector reform that this approach addresses an important part, but only a certain part of the problem. The underlying structural causes of interstate and especially intrastate crises cannot be resolved through quick fixes. Security sector reform does not end with the cessation of the most obvious gross violence and warfare. It is a medium-range reform programme, which has to be embedded in a long-term process of peacebuilding.

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