



A bridge too far?

Considering security sector reform in Africa

Security sector (or system) reform (SSR) has become an accepted part of the larger peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction agendas. It is posited as a crucial aspect in the creation of an enabling environment for development and stability. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the SSR process was designed as a means 'to strengthen the ability of the sector as a whole and each of its individual parts to provide an accountable, equitable, effective and rights respecting public service'.¹

The utility of the UNDP definition lies in its simple and succinct capturing of several aspects that are crucial to SSR, notably the following:

- SSR interventions are targeted at both the systemic and sector-specific levels. Sector specific activities should be designed with both the efficiency and effectiveness of the specific sector and the system that provides security in mind
- Three primary areas for intervention and programming are identified. The focus of SSR programmes should be to strengthen the accountability, equitability, effectiveness *and* respect for rights of the services (note that *and* is used, not *or*). In other words, the most basic goal of SSR is to create legitimate, professional and accountable security service providers

From this perspective it is easy to see that the actors involved in SSR can be diverse ranging from the state executive, legislative and judicial levels to the security actors (statutory, non-statutory and private providers of security services) and citizens of the state. As a concept SSR is primarily concerned with the capacity of the state to meet the security needs of the people in a manner that is consistent with democratic norms and practices.

It has, however, been argued that the SSR model has seemingly been unable to translate its ambitious reform principles into practical reform programmes.² This paper seeks to provide a brief analysis and insight on some of the issues within an African context that challenges

the translation of the principles of SSR into concrete programmes that result in legitimate, professional and accountable security service providers.

CLOUDS ON THE CONCEPTUAL HORIZON

As the concept of SSR has gained international currency, so too has critique of the conceptual framework become an increasingly popular academic exercise. The concept has been criticised as being very general with an unknown depth and width.³ As more states have pursued reform agendas, the hazy depth and breadth of the concept has resulted in any reform to the security apparatus of the state being packaged and proclaimed as SSR. This has occurred - and continues to occur - in Burundi, Uganda, Ghana and the Central African Republic, to name but a few.

The very utility and legitimacy of the concept of SSR is being threatened by the inability to identify central values or criteria that identify change within the security apparatus as SSR. At the moment all or any reforms within the security sector that can be justified for donor support, regardless of the intention, motivation or desired outcome, are being packaged and sold as SSR. It then becomes difficult to determine if SSR is truly part of the peacebuilding agenda or if it is just being used as a means to justify and solicit support for building state security agencies.

ISSUES OF SCOPE AND SUBSTANCE

Related to the very broad conceptual geography that SSR can span are problems of scope and substance. Issues of scope have been raised above, the essence being that failing to, in practice, translate into fundamental changes in the entire security system, SSR activities remain fragmented, piecemeal and sector specific. The concept of SSR intrinsically observes the importance of coherence and multi-sectoral strategies. Whether it is due to a lack of political feasibility or capacity (human and financial)

constraints, the actual chance of developing and implementing such a broad and overarching restructuring, realignment and reorientation of the security system is questionable. This is even more so in the contexts in which SSR is being pursued in Africa.

The reasons are perhaps not as obvious as the resource constraints that are commonly enunciated. There are fundamental shortcomings in the political systems in which many of these reform processes are being undertaken that obstruct key principles of SSR. These include the central role of the legislature and civil society, the principle of local ownership, and the requirements for a security vision representative of the needs of the state and its people. Overcoming the vast power imbalances between the various governance actors and moving from a position in which the executive is the centre of the security system require the fundamental change envisioned by SSR. But the SSR agenda, in and of itself, cannot possibly address the core systemic problems within especially post-conflict states in Africa.

In 2000, Rocky Williams warned that as long as theories, structures and assumed relationships remain divorced from the local needs, context and realities, the activities pursued become exhausted formal repetitions or mere a mirroring of doctrinal mannerisms.⁴ Some of the structures and assumed relationships have limited utility or even relevance in the context of security sector governance in some African states. Williams explained as follows:⁵

The limited utility of some Western 'models' of security sector reorganisation should not be constituted as an attack on some of those principles which are cardinal to the practice of security sector reform. The limited utility or appropriateness of certain formal mechanisms of civil control in developing countries, for instance, does not detract from the principles upon which these mechanisms are predicated (the principle of civil supremacy and the importance of precisely defining the roles and tasks of the armed forces, for instance). The limitation of the current Western civil-military relations discourse lies in its ontological pretensions and not in the formal, epistemological status of central concepts.

In other words, although the principles are sound, they might just be irrelevant in certain contexts. The institution-building exercise that is SSR will be severely impeded by systemic governance weaknesses, legitimacy deficits, and structural and functional anomalies. For instance, the relevance of civil control of the armed forces is widely accepted. But what weight or benefit does parliamentary authorisation for the use of force hold if that authorisation is issued by a legislative authority that (a) does not hold broad legitimacy, or (b) is politically

insignificant, or (c) is unable to hold the executive to account, or (d) is under single-party majority control and highly partisan, or (e) is based on corrupt practices, nepotism or clientism?

Part of the problem is that SSR is regularly linked to stabilisation and post-conflict reconstruction in a manner that is almost positing SSR as a panacea to violent conflict. An example of this rhetoric is drawn from a statement from the Security Council of the United Nations:⁶

... security sector reform is an essential element of any stabilisation and reconstruction process in post-conflict environments.

The Security Council stresses that reforming the security sector in post-conflict environments is critical to the consolidation of peace and stability, promoting poverty reduction, rule of law and good governance, extending legitimate state authority and preventing countries from relapsing into conflict. In that regard, a professional, effective and accountable security sector, and accessible and impartial law-enforcement and justice sectors are equally necessary to laying the foundations for peace and sustainable development.

SSR is being situated as central to the post-conflict reconstruction agenda, as indicated above with reference to security service providers as the 'foundations for peace and sustainable development'. There are, however, a range of political, social and economic problems that could result in insecurity or instability that are outside of the realm of the security sector. As David Chuter noted, there are many factors which can undermine political and economic life and so cause instability that even a perfectly functioning security sector cannot cope with.⁷

Understanding the contribution that SSR can make to stabilisation and reconstruction would entail an appreciation of the threats posed by an unreformed security sector. First, regarding the security service providers with the authority and ability to exercise use of force and special powers such as arrest and detention (military, police, intelligence agencies), historically the threat to human security posed by these security actors stems from the capacity of these actors to be utilised in a partisan manner, to suppress opposition or manipulate the security context and political environment.

Second, regarding the justice sector, the delivery of justice services should be a central component of the relationship between the state and its people. Justice should be positioned as the foundation of the social contract and the ability of the government to provide justice should be the foundation of the legitimacy of the ruling authority. Both these issues will be dealt with in more detail as the discussion develops.

INGREDIENTS AND OPTIONS FOR CHANGE

Questions are often asked as to the substantive components of the security sector that would be recipients of reform activities. It has become commonplace to adopt a broad and inclusive vision of the security system, thereby allowing various reforms or donor activities focused on governance and institution-building to be considered part of the SSR agenda. The reason for the emergence and increasing popularity of adopting a maximalist approach to the definition of the components of the security sector is a historical and evolutionary development. It comes primarily from merging the good governance agenda with the traditional approach to international engagement within the security sector such as training and technical support. Furthermore, the international development aid and donor environment moved away from the downsizing and poverty-reduction focus of military interventions commonplace in the late 1980s and early 1990s to emphasising a better alignment with security needs and capacities as the focus for budget allocation.

The institution building exercise that is SSR is impeded by systemic governance weaknesses, legitimacy deficits and functional anomalies

In looking at the evolution of the concept of SSR, the relevance of the emergence of a broad approach to coordinate donor interventions regarding the security sector, at a time when the conceptualisation of security and the nature of conflict were changing, is often glossed over. SSR gained conceptual weight in a period of considerable conceptual development with the shift toward human-centred approaches to security and new types of conflict taking precedence. The concept of SSR is a reflection of the changing nature of conflict and the emergence of new wars.⁸ But the relationship between the security sector, conflict and stability has not received much attention. Nor have sufficient linkages been developed between the study of conflict (causes, management and resolution of conflict) and the security sector.

In one of the few commentaries on the linkages between conflict, governance and the security sector, the following was noted:⁹

Promoting better governance of the security sector is seen as a means of enhancing human security and development. While implicit in this debate is an appreciation that security sector reform can help reduce violent conflict, relatively little analysis has been done on security sector reform as a conflict prevention issue. Yet poor governance of the security sector is often a source of conflict and a key obstacle to peace-building. Of the 44 countries in conflict in the world, many have security forces that reflect and perpetuate social cleavages (ethnic or political) that lie at the heart of violence. These forces are also frequently associated with repressive acts against civilians and violations of human rights. The transformation of the security sector is critical to the success of peace agreements and the fostering of structural stability so that societies can live in a safe and secure environment.

What has been created is an inventory of security actors, structures and institutions that can be targeted for reform. The emerging problem with this approach is that although the linkages between democratic institutions and good governance to SSR are uncontested and assumed to have positive correlations, there has been minimal analysis and negligible logical interconnection.

The approach to good governance and the imperative for democratic institutions is increasingly becoming an almost formulaic expression of having parliamentary committees, human rights commissions and mechanisms for control. Merely having these structures and routinely hosting capacity-building exercises within these structures neither automatically contributes towards good governance nor to having an accountable and non-partisan security sector. Such mechanisms of democratic governance have value as symbols of commitment to good governance and can be seen as confidence-building measures,¹⁰ but the utility of these structures should not automatically be assumed to be that of guarantors of democratic governance or of creating more responsive and representative security structures.

It could in fact be that having a maximalist approach to the definition of actors within the security sector serves mainly as utility in packaging donor-related activities. It also serves as a convenience for actors seeking donor funding to be able to package a wide range of activities to meet the current appeal of support to SSR activities.

A pragmatic approach,¹¹ which could increase the focus and prioritisation, would entail a preoccupation with the traditional statutory instruments of state-centred security, that is, the military, police, intelligence, paramilitary and non-statutory forces. Such an approach has severe limitations, however, most significantly when

considering the reform of the criminal justice system, which would have to entail a systemic approach to the maintenance and enforcement of law and order, namely the police, the judicial system and prisons.

But perhaps a pragmatic approach is more suitable to certain contexts where real prioritisation is needed and security services providers need to be enabled. This could be relevant in instances such as in connection with the withdrawal of a peacekeeping force. It is becoming increasingly significant for SSR to be viewed as a prerequisite for the withdrawal of a peacekeeping force so that the responsibility for the provision of security services is transferred from the international force to the state security service providers. The current situation and SSR context in Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are archetypal of this position. In such a context, the primary focus for reform is on the creation of police and military forces. This can, however, lead to imbalances within the security system and in the resource allocations to the various sub-sectors - for example having a robust police reform programme that is not supported by similarly significant interventions in the justice and penal sectors.

But perhaps more concerning has been that in both the cases mentioned above the tendency has been to prioritise getting 'boots on the ground' above other SSR imperatives such as professionalism, alignment with security needs and accountability. Given that the imperative is to have some force for the provision of security and the maintenance of order, the key focus is on training and deploying a national force. In the DRC, evidence of the looting and violent behaviour of the Congolese Defence Force, FARDC, during the unrest in eastern DRC late in 2008 supports the notion that having a deployable force is not equivalent to having a well-trained and professional force. Part of the challenge is that conducting SSR in an insecure situation creates certain pressures and imperatives that can potentially have negative consequences on the physical security of the population. This was expressed in a 2002 occasional paper as follows:¹²

The principle of effective and efficient security forces is often emphasised in reform processes because improved performance of security functions can have a substantial impact on a country's stability. However, improved performance as such is not sufficient, as the danger also exists that such a focus may make the security forces more efficient at repressing the population ...

In Liberia, the training of the fledgling defence force by DynCorp International has attracted wide criticism. The issue might not be a central concern with the quality of training but rather on the prioritisation of training

and having a deployable force over some of the 'softer issues' such as local ownership and accountability to the Liberian state and its people. The blame cannot be laid at the door of DynCorp, as is often done. In the development of the peace agreement and with the emergence of the new state authority, it was convenient to outsource the burden of trading and developing an armed force while the transitional state was able to come to grips with the challenge of rebuilding the country.

Because SSR is a veritable smorgasbord of activities, prioritisation has to occur and this will be dependent above all on the local context. In 2002, Lilly et al differentiated between five types of country groups:¹³

- Consolidating democracies
- Lapsing or stalled democracies
- Transitional democracies
- Conflict-torn societies
- States under reconstruction

The typology was created as an attempt to synthesise and represent a goal-oriented approach to SSR, but with particular emphasis on roles for external assistance. An abridged version of the table represented in Lilly et al is produced on the following page:

This is a useful distinction which allows for a generalised overview of the competing SSR needs and priorities. The argument can therefore be posed that the security actors that should be the focus of reforms should be determined by the security context, political capabilities (what would be politically relevant) and societal necessities. Such an approach could overcome the wasteful utilisation of resources in pursuit of noble activities that are politically irrelevant in this context.

What will be most challenging (and ultimately necessary) will perhaps be to develop an understanding and appreciation of the objectives of an SSR programme or intervention. This entails more than just identifying the final vision of the security sector and needs to incorporate an understanding of the motivations of reform. The process delivers on what was desired from the reform. In other words, the issue of why SSR is pursued has far-reaching effects on what will be and can be achieved by the process and on what will be prioritised. The issue of motivations reflects not only on why political authorities decide to pursue reforms but also on why donors interact on certain interventions. SSR cannot be separated from practical and political imperatives at national, regional and international levels.

Chuter¹⁴ proposed a pragmatic solution to the problem of defining the security sector and prioritising interventions based on judgements about what the threats to stability are, and how they should be addressed. The implication is that SSR programmes should

Table 1 The five types of country groups (abridged version)

Country type	Contextual conditions	Security sector reform goals
Consolidating democracies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Healthy democratic institutions and good governance ■ Minimisation of external shocks including the impact of economic stabilisation and adjustment ■ Conducive international and regional security environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Good governance ■ Democratic accountability ■ Maintain professionalism ■ Reduce costs of security ■ Empower legislature and civil society ■ Assure public security, access to justice, rule of law ■ Collective (regional and international) security
Lapsing or stalled democracies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Willingness of governments or opponents to resolve differences through politics not violence ■ Ability of political and civil society to withstand authoritarian proclivities ■ Interconnections between economic and political sources of security/insecurity ■ Leverage exercised by other governments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increased democratic accountability ■ Prevent escalation of political conflict into violence ■ Avoid politicisation and de-professionalism of security agencies ■ Contain privatisation of violence ■ Prevent human rights abuses, maintain rule of law ■ Empower civil/political society
Transitional democracies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nature of transition ■ Depth of authoritarian legacies and scope for neutralising them ■ Strength of pro-democracy movement ■ How far professionalism of security forces maintained ■ Presence or absence of civil and criminal violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Peaceful democratic transition ■ Good governance and democratic accountability ■ Re-professionalisation and de-politisation of security agencies ■ Ensure regulation of privatisation of violence ■ Ensure accountability for human rights abuses ■ Assure public security, access to justice and rule of law ■ Empower legislature and civil society
Conflict-torn societies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Survival (or not) of some legitimate framework of public authority ■ International/regional economic and political mechanisms sustaining or limiting conflict ■ Degree of political/social polarisation ■ Destruction/resilience of civil society ■ Scale of public security gap and human rights abuses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Conflict resolution / end of violence ■ Control by legitimate authorities over all armed groups / means of violence ■ Minimise indiscipline and corruption of security agencies ■ Minimise human rights abuses by all combatants ■ Disarm/demobilise combatants ■ Restore public security, rule of law ■ Strengthen regional conflict-resolution and peacekeeping mechanisms
State under reconstruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How conflict terminated and likelihood of reigniting ■ Legacies of polarisation and how managed ■ Establishment of democratic and inclusive governance ■ Ability of government to fill 'governance voids' and 'security gaps' ■ Resilience of civil society ■ Economic reconstruction and its impact on employment, welfare and inequality ■ Insulation from regional economic/political mechanisms sustaining violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prevent re-ignition of conflict ■ Rebuild legitimacy and capacity of public authorities ■ Reassess security needs and roles of security agencies ■ Disarm, demobilise and reintegrate ex-combatants ■ Restructure, re-professionalise security agencies ■ Establish democratic control ■ Ensure balanced, inclusive recruitment ■ Accountability for human rights abuses ■ Restore public security, rule of law ■ Limit privatisation of security

only be conducted when at least one of the following criteria is met:

- There are weaknesses or defects in the current security arrangements which materially provoked the crisis or are materially obstructing a return to stability, or
- Even if the above is not the case, initiatives can be undertaken to improve the security arrangements of the country when the security agencies will themselves substantially assist in the restoration of stability

Such an approach is useful in determining the order of priorities. In essence, Chuter advocates for an approach that limits SSR interventions to those that demonstrably impact on the stability of the country.¹⁵ Such an approach

would be particularly useful in immediate post-conflict contexts and in situations in which the provision of security is an immediate and urgent concern. This might not be a useful distinction in transitional and consolidating democracies. The difference, however, is that in transitional and consolidating democracies there would be less donor interest or involvement as the state would be assumed to be able to determine and guide the further development and refinement of the security sector in line with democratic evolution.

A challenge for SSR is going to be the usefulness of interventions within the security structures in lapsing or stalled democracies. There is the potential for SSR to be related to conflict prevention efforts, but the utility of this has yet to be adequately experienced. The key would be to be able to create sufficient space between the

political authority and the security agencies so that the political actors would not be able to utilise the security forces in a crackdown against the opposition. However, when faced with militia or insurgency in a lapsing democracy, the imperatives for reform or change within the security structure would focus more on effectiveness and could contribute to instability in the short and long term.

The challenge for successful SSR programming is largely dependent on the political context and whether or not the political actors can actually extend legitimate control and authority. Questioning whether state structures or institutions (parliament, ministries, departments, auditor general, etc) are needed in order to implement SSR or if they will be built as a consequence of SSR, is similar to wondering if the chicken or egg came first. On the one hand, the process of reforming the security sector (especially in a post-conflict society) is essentially concerned with building the capacity and legitimacy of the state institutions and actors that comprise the security sector.¹⁶ Overcoming deficits in democratic governance of the security sector is as much a goal of SSR as is creating more efficient, effective and appropriate security forces.

Conversely, though, having state institutions with no legitimacy and no capacity will not enable the SSR process. Logically, there would have to be some kind of basis from which to start. The position presented here is that there would have to be legitimate state institutions and structures as the most basic prerequisite for SSR. The question then is, from where does a state derive its legitimacy? The most obvious answer is from the people in the form of a democratic expression of the will of the people - in other words through an undisputedly free and fair election. However, an elected government or a transitional government arrangement reached through agreement does not as a matter of existence exercise legitimacy. A conceptual enquiry on the topic of legitimacy, brings three characteristics to the fore, namely that legitimacy entails:

- *The right to represent* - the recognition by the government and the people of the right of the government to govern (to make and implement decisions)
- *The right governing regime* – the recognition that the system of governance is desirable and suitable to the needs and interests of the actor
- *The right structures* – the recognition that the institutions of the state are appropriate

All three aspects highlighted above operate from the primary proposition that legitimacy exists at the level of the individual, or rather in a more Hobbesian manner, the individual is the source of legitimacy. This implies that if a government is maintaining stability through

a coercive social order which is oppressive to certain individuals or groups, that government lacks legitimacy. Such an understanding of state legitimacy is very much in tune with current human security rhetoric. Similarly, if the structures through which decisions are made and implemented have no resonance with those being governed, there would be legitimacy deficits.

Considering the relationship between legitimacy and SSR moves the discussion in the direction of the legitimate use of force and the legitimate exercise of coercive power. A legitimate government has the right to make and implement decisions regarding security and the use of force. The right to utilise force and coercive power can only be accessed legitimate if the other two aspects of legitimacy are recognised. In other words, the state is legitimate in the use of force when the system and institutions through which that decision is made and implemented are legitimate.

Legitimacy is conferred on structures and institutions through standardised normative patterns, rules of behaviour and agreement with social values. An intelligence service can be deemed legitimate, for example, if it conducts its functions in a manner consistent with respect for human rights, in agreement with a legally determined mandate and in service of the 'greater good' (non-partisanship).

Legitimacy within the security sector would be based on:

- *Representative security forces* – representative of the society in terms of ethnicity, race and gender but also representative of the security needs and normative values of the society
- *System of checks and balances* – having a security systems in which decisions are made and implemented in a manner consistent with the vales of the political system
- *Security institutions* - having the security (and oversight) bodies that are appropriate to the needs of the people, that have legally constituted mandates and functions and derive their authority from the rule of law

There are both legal and moralistic implications of such a notion of legitimacy. Rule of law and justice are a source of legitimacy for the government because adherence to the law is based on either consent in the authority of the lawmaker or belief in the procedure that produced the law. Legitimacy has moralistic basis in that the government derives legitimacy from serving the 'greater good' or the perception that the government is the caretaker of the needs of the people. As such the government earns legitimacy through the protection of human life and the provision of basic services. The matter of

first principle should be 'do no harm'. If a government presents a threat to its citizens, it cannot be considered a legitimate authority.

The problem with legitimacy is that it exists in the eye of the beholder. An ethnic minority suffering economic discrimination within a society might not perceive the governing authority as legitimate. The presumption of legitimacy is often based on the very human flaw of self-interest – the perception of legitimacy is more likely to be present if something is being gained from the relationship. For example, an international donor would perceive the state as legitimate because of an interest in the engagement and relationship, in getting something out of it.

The fundamentals of local ownership are being tested as local actors are voicing commitment to the principles of SSR in the search for donor funding

In the long term, it is going to prove counter productive for the international community to pour reservoirs of resources into building structures in service of an authority with legitimacy deficits. All that is happening in practice is that questionable regimes are being enabled to create a strong security apparatus which in all probability will be used against the population in pursuit of highly partisan interests, most likely to quell opposition and maintain control. SSR programming should be fundamentally concerned with the restoration and extension of legitimacy and could benefit from being more selective in the choice of partners and interventions. Without such selection, the integrity of the concept and potentials for success could be severely impeded.

LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND OWNING LOCALS

For reasons primarily related to imbalances in the production of knowledge, the SSR debate globally has been dominated by donor approaches and donor perspectives on SSR. This has manifested in the development of handbooks, guides and checklists to aid in the simplification of implementing activities that essentially are concerned with changing power relations within the

structures of the state that bear responsibility for the provision of security. This is especially evident in the manner in which the concepts of local ownership and civil society are employed in the international literature.

Local ownership is a fundamental principle in the donor approach to SSR and is always situated as the central pillar of donor engagement on SSR, not because of practicality but rather to enhance the political allure of security-related interventions. For the international donor community, of course, there is an imperative for SSR interventions not to be perceived as seeming to influence or manipulate one of the key areas of state sovereignty. The security services play an integral part in guaranteeing state sovereignty. It would be negligent to attempt an intervention in this area of activity without due consideration of the relationship between the perception of authority and power in the international global order and the security services.

The principle of local ownership makes a convenient bridge. This is not to say that there is no value in the principle of local ownership but rather to caution that (a) it might not be practicable in certain circumstances and (b) it would be naïve to assume that principle does not benefit those who hold on to it. The fundamentals of local ownership are being tested as local actors are becoming proficient in the language of SSR and voicing commitment to principles in the search for donor funding in pursuit of not so admirable ends.

Regarding the role of civil society in SSR, there is an altruistic desire for SSR programming to be based on the security needs and aspirations of the people. But as Chuter notes,¹⁷ experience suggests that SSR programmes risk being elite bargains between teams of foreign practitioners under pressure to demonstrate results and with money to spend and local groups and individuals happy to make use of the team for their own purposes.

The problem or complexities of the role of civil society in SSR has three primary aspects:

- *Problems of definition:* Civil society can generally be defined as the set of actors that occupy the social space between the state, the market and the family. Such a wide scope allows for a high degree of selectivity when planning and engaging in civil society participation exercises. The problem of definition also extends to defining the role that can be played by civil society, the scope of which is largely dependent on who defines that role.
- *Problems of perception:* There is generally not an open relationship between civil society organisations and government or authorities in Africa. The space for civil society engagement in Africa is a contested space and the voice of civil society, especially on issues related to governance and human rights, is often not

welcomed. Civil society is often perceived as being unfairly critical, manipulative or operating in pursuit of a foreign agenda. Grassroots organisations are often perceived as being more concerned with 'softer' welfare issues and not able (capacity and resources) to contribute to the security debate. Civil society could be an implementation partner in complementing the capacity of the state in terms of expertise, but this would require a fundamental shift in (a) the generally negative perception towards civil society and (b) in the manner in which security, power and control are conceptualised at national level.

- *Problems of motivation:* The civil society groups that do participate in the broader SSR initiatives are generally representative of a limited or elite interest. This is often related more to capacity and resources than anything else. The problem is that sometimes under the guise of democratic participation, elite actors seek influence and often utilise the space for consultation for personal enrichment. Civil society representatives are often paid for participation by the donor community or receive funding for their activities from the donor community, thus calling into question not only the motivations for engagement but also any recommendations delivered.

Beneath the donor-centred dominance has emerged a second tier of analysis that has been largely preoccupied with descriptive analysis and the documentation of case studies. This body of knowledge has broader ownership and is an area in which knowledge producers in the developing world and so called recipient states have contributed. The full utility of country studies is yet to be realised. Although patterns, good practices and lessons learned are beginning to emerge, there has been limited significant comparative research in order to facilitate the development of a predictive capability to better understand the possibilities for and obstacles to reform in particular states or contexts.

The gap exists between
the normative agenda for
SSR and the organisation
and exercise of power

OF CONFLICT AND CONSENSUS

Much like current analysis utilises hindsight to play judge and jury on the development and poverty

reduction strategies of years before, so too will future analysis judge the successes, failures and impacts of SSR. There can be no doubt that the very popularity of the concept has become both an asset and liability.¹⁸ It is an asset because of the raised profile of issues that perhaps would not otherwise feature on the international donor agenda. It is an asset in that it has brought renewed attention and questioning of notions and constructs of security, allowing for an enriched albeit mainly academic debate on the nature and provision of security.

This SSR debate has largely centred on institutional and organisational mechanisms to provide security and has not sufficiently translated into questioning security challenges and responses. It has become accepted that a state should have military, police and intelligence services but little thought has been given to the *raison d'être* of these traditional security providers in the face of non-traditional security treats. Furthermore, the relationship between the constructs of democracy, human rights and security and the role of the security providers has not been interrogated in any detail.

Perhaps conceptually SSR is a victim of its own creation, because although the requirement of comprehensive, coherent and fundamental reform is theoretically sound, it opens a Pandora's box of pitfalls in implementation. Most concerning however is the ability of illegitimate authorities to capitalise on the broad agenda to generate funds and support to strengthen the state security apparatus in pursuit of questionable objectives. The reason why this exploitable gap exists is a failure to insist upon the elucidation of basic values as central to any SSR activities. These basic values begin with legitimacy and respect for human rights.

Brzoska argued a similar point as follows:¹⁹

However, it would be counterproductive to downscale the vision of security sector reform and reduce objectives to the level of current practice. Much of the very attraction of the concept stems from its high level of normative ambition. Nevertheless, it would be a good thing if practical policies had an additional yardstick to give effective support to the vision of a near-perfect security sector. Priorities for activities need to be deduced from the general principles of a 'good' security sector, and criteria need to be developed for judging the security sector reform compatibility of initiatives started in developing countries.

The utility of a value-based approach will require greater sensitivities to the subtleties and relationships between the security services and the value-based behaviour desired. This relates to a previously raised issue of the need for a deeper understanding of the assumptions on which the reform agenda is based. These assumptions

underpin the entire spectrum of SSR activities and are in essence representative of the greater ontological problem which plagues SSR in Africa.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

To me - perhaps as a researcher - the recommendations have logical connections to the need for more research. But it is not necessarily the generation of larger amounts of data and information that is required. Much of the literature perused for this discussion comes from the 2000-2003 period in which the fundamentals of the SSR agenda were internationally debated, interrogated and affirmed. The information is available and honestly, there is very little that can be identified as information gaps on SSR.

The gap exists between the normative agenda for SSR and systemic limitations in the organisation and exercise of power in Africa. Too often reform within the security sector is viewed in isolation from the larger social, economic and political system. Hegel noted that all social systems inherently contain contradictions, the resolution of which presses for social change. SSR is ultimately about overcoming contradictions between security, power, the people and the state.

Albeit a difficult task, this is not an ambition that can be easily discarded.

NOTES

- 1 United Nations Development Programme, *Security sector reform and transitional justice: a crisis post-conflict programmatic approach*, New York: UNDP, 2003, 5, http://www.undp.org/cpr/documents/jssr/ssr/UNDP_2003_JSSR_Approach.doc (accessed 4 May 2009).
- 2 Mark Sedra, Security sector reform in Afghanistan and Iraq: exposing a concept in crisis, *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 3(7) (2007), 7-23.
- 3 For example Dylan Hendrickson, Key issues in security sector reform, Working Papers 1, The Conflict, Security & Development Group, 1999; Rocky Williams, Africa and the challenges of security sector reform, in *Building stability in Africa: challenges for the new millennium*, Monograph 46, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, 2000, <http://www.iss.co.za/Pubs/Monographs/No46/Africa.html> (accessed 9 February 2009).
- 4 Williams, Africa and the challenges of security sector reform.
- 5 Ibid.
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ABOUT THIS PAPER

Security sector reform has become an accepted part of the international peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction agenda. It is posited as a crucial aspect in the creation of an enabling environment for development and stability.

Experience with the implementation of security sector reform programmes has been varied. It is increasingly being argued that current approaches to reform are unable to translate ambitious reform principles into a practical agenda that results in improved security and justice service delivery. This paper seeks to provide a brief analysis of and insight into conceptual and practical challenges that affect the conceptualisation and implementation of security sector reform programmes in Africa.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lauren Hutton is a researcher with the Security Sector Governance Programme of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS). She joined the ISS in February 2007 and has been focusing on issues of security and justice service delivery for the past three years. Her research areas of interest include security sector reform in Africa, gender and security sector reform, and the democratic control of the intelligence sector.

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