Security Sector Governance and Reform in Africa

Background Paper developed for the Learning Lab on Security Sector Governance and Reform in Africa

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1. Introduction – an ambitious agenda

An effective and accountable security sector is an integral part of a functional democracy. For this reason promoting democratic security sector governance (SSG) through security sector reform (SSR) is increasingly recognized as a key enabler for wider agendas to promote peace, development, the protection of human rights, and the rule of law. SSR is a highly sensitive process, which challenges the dynamics of power relations in the security sector. It aims to introduce greater accountability, transparency and values such as inclusion and equality. It should therefore be no surprise that if the need for more accountable and more effective security sectors can be seen across a variety of states in Africa, SSR efforts on the ground have to date not delivered the transformational change hoped for this ambitious policy agenda.

What is difficult about SSR in Africa? On one level, the framing conditions are undoubtedly challenging. Change of the kind that SSR aims for is measured in decades – even generations – rather than the months or years that measure national political cycles or donor programmes. Moreover, in most contexts the resources to support transformational change have also been scarce, whether human, material, technical or financial. On a more fundamental level, SSR is highly political and context-specific. If it is treated as a technical process abstracted from national political, security, socio-economic and cultural realities, it will not succeed.

At the same time reform has stumbled on more intangible obstacles and in particular the lack of a shared vision of what the security sector should be in a free and fair society. Thus, in many parts of the continent, security remains a taboo subject. Decision-making is often restricted to a narrow cadre of political and security elites, driven by their particular interests and priorities. Security forces fail to see themselves as dedicated to meeting the safety and security needs of the population they serve. Outdated legal frameworks, under-capacitated parliaments, and submissive judicial authorities fail to provide the oversight, transparency or accountability that is required to protect human rights and uphold the rule of law. Public discussion of security is often suppressed by restrictions on freedom of information and media coverage or through fear. Self-censorship, social legacies of autocratic governance and weak civil society capacity on security issues all contribute to a deafening silence on the nature and direction of security sector governance.

There are also undoubted weaknesses and gaps in current SSR approaches. Different understandings of what SSR involves and who it concerns have led to flawed interventions that bred mistrust and
suspicion, including between national and international understandings of reform. There is no doubt that national ownership is the cornerstone of successful international support to SSR.\(^2\) Indeed, UNSC Resolution 2151 (2014, §4), which calls for national ownership of all SSR efforts, “recognizes that security sector reform needs to be in support of, and informed by, broader national political processes, inclusive of all segments of the society, including the participation of civil society, that lay the foundations for stability and peace through national dialogue and reconciliation efforts.” Yet international engagement in this field to date highlights the lack of shared understandings of reform that could resolve the tension between intervention and ownership: thus, although externally-supported SSR is welcomed in some quarters, in others it still resonates with the imposition of alien values, methods and approaches.

Yet the fact remains that freer and fairer democratic societies require more accountable and more effective security provision. In spite of the factors that limit progress in SSR, experience has shown that important progress can be made when internal and external support for reform align at opportune moments for change. New legal architecture for state security provision, fairer and more inclusive security recruitment, broader-based access to justice, more efficient management and oversight, and increased public scrutiny of security affairs are examples of reform that mark valuable progress in security governance. Moreover, progress can materialise in unexpected and intangible forms; thus, some of the most catalytic changes in people’s experiences of security have flowed from apparently subjective shifts in attitudes towards things like more inclusive security policymaking, greater sensitivity to human rights in security provision, or a strengthened resolve among overseers to make the most of their legal authority.

While progress is possible, it is often qualified. Thus, for example, it was a promising step forward in Guinea when authorities refrained from using the armed forces for public order in Conakry and ended the use of lethal weapons by police and gendarmeries, even though abuse by the security forces continued with the suppression of civil and political rights. Similarly, in Côte d’Ivoire, 2015 saw progress when new legislation replaced the country’s 1961 defence law. Harmonized conditions for general mobilization, recognition of the key role of the National Security Council on defence matters, the establishment of a defence coordination committee, and regulation of the conditions for military intervention in law enforcement and rescue operations all notably improved the effectiveness and governance of the defence sector. Yet such progress is tempered by continuing political tension over elections and a security situation that remains fragile.

In sum, there are multiple reasons why SSR in Africa is difficult but examples of reform also show that significant opportunities to move towards more democratic security governance do exist. The ‘Learning Lab on Security Sector Governance and Reform in Africa’ will draw on the experience of academics, researchers, policy makers and practitioners in this field in order to explore these challenges and identify ways to move forward in spite of them. To support these reflections, this Background Paper provides a baseline understanding of SSG/R concepts, policies and practice. It then considers key challenges for SSR in Africa before assessing programming gaps and potential entry points for engagement. The Background Paper is complemented by six Think Pieces, which are intended to help shape discussion during the different sessions of the Learning Lab.

\(^2\) For practical approaches to apply national ownership in practice see: [http://www.dcaf.ch/Publications/Political-Leadership-and-National-Ownership-of-Security-Sector-Reform-Processes](http://www.dcaf.ch/Publications/Political-Leadership-and-National-Ownership-of-Security-Sector-Reform-Processes)
African scholarship and practice has played a key role in shaping the SSR policy discourse. In the late 1990s, a network of African analysts, in collaboration with committed Africanists, embarked on a process of experience-sharing – including in South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana. The lessons and experiences identified through this process fed into the SSR policy development process at the international level catalysed by the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC). It also led to the first ever Handbook on Security Sector Governance in Africa, which pre-dated and provided important lessons for the seminal OECD DAC SSR Handbook. Through its promotion by European development agencies in the early 2000s, SSR quickly became a pillar of multilateral strategies for crisis prevention, peacebuilding and development for organizations such as the United Nations, the African Union, ECOWAS, the European Union, the World Bank and the OECD.

African regional entities in particular have come to play an increasingly important role in supporting new norms of security governance. ECOWAS was the first among Africa’s regional bodies to develop these norms with the entry into force of various regional instruments. Good governance of the security sector underpins the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security (1999), the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) and the Code of Conduct for the Armed Forces and Security Services (2011), and later the draft Regional Framework on Security Sector Reform and Governance. Other parts of the continent have also strengthened their responses, most notably at the continent level with the development of the African Union Framework for SSR (2013). The increasing codification of the principle of democratic SSR has reinforced the influence of regional norms development in international approaches to security governance: it is significant that the first UNSC resolution on SSR was sponsored by Nigeria.

Although SSR has become the dominant discourse, a number of related concepts such as security sector development, management, reconstruction and transformation have emerged to emphasize a particular type of context or approach. In the South African experience, the insecurity and injustice caused by apartheid necessitated a comprehensive dismantling of the national governance framework. This influenced the thinking of many African scholars who use security sector transformation (SST) to stress the need for a fundamental shift that alters the culture, values and character of security actors. SST should not be understood as a distinct or competing concept to SSR. Rather it draws on the challenging realities of different African political trajectories – from military dictatorship to long-term authoritarian rule or armed conflict – to underline the context-specific difficulties of implementing reforms in Africa.

Over time, SSR has been embraced by diverse development, democracy promotion, and security communities. Although often misinterpreted to mean any kind of assistance or reform in field of security, a consensus has emerged among many bilateral actors, international organizations and individual experts that the goal of SSR is to support effective and accountable provision of state and

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4 Alan Bryden and Funmi Olonisakin, eds., Security Sector Transformation in Africa (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2010).
human security within a framework of democratic governance, rule of law, and respect for human rights. This definition is important because it emphasizes that the state can only enhance democracy, development and security if it is concerned not only with national defence but also with human security. This link between state and human security is crucial because it recognizes that security provision, management and oversight are intrinsically related: security institutions that are poorly managed and not subject to democratic oversight cannot credibly provide for human security; yet, at the same time, no security sector can provide for human security if it is ineffective, unprofessional, or poorly equipped. Thus, understanding that effectiveness and accountability of the security sector are two sides of the same human security coin is the defining feature of the SSR agenda. Grasping this link matters because this is what differentiates SSR from efforts to improve the effectiveness of armed and security forces without regard for democratic control, rule of law or human rights. This is an essential caveat: security assistance that offers only technical support to increase the effectiveness of the military or other security bodies has frequently simply been rebranded as ‘SSR’ when in fact such activities are inconsistent with SSR because they actually contribute to insecurity from a human security perspective.

The SSR discourse emerged as a response to dysfunctional security sector governance and its consequences for human security. Security sector governance refers to the exercise of power and authority over security affairs within a state and it is a key companion concept to SSR. SSG emphasizes the wide array of actors with a stake in security and justice at local, national, regional and international levels, whether as providers, overseers or beneficiaries, and regardless of whether state or non-state actors (Figure 1 shows the range of actors who might figure in a comprehensive definition of the security sector). Taking a governance perspective of human security also shows why both state and non-state justice providers are integral to the concept of the security sector. On one hand, the experience of security is intimately linked to justice in people’s experience but on the other hand, state justice systems are essential to the guarantee of human rights and the defence of the rule of law. Seeing the intersections between the provision, control and management of both justice and security within a framework of democratic governance is thus fundamental to the way that SSR aims to improve human security.
SSG also highlights the extent to which relationships among this wide array of security sector actors reflect the principles of good governance. SSG is described as dysfunctional when the relationships that govern security and justice provision, control and management are not accountable, transparent, responsive, participatory, equitable and inclusive, effective and efficient, consensus oriented, and subject to rule of law. SSR provides a response to a dysfunctional security sector through reforms that attempt to apply these principles of good governance to the way the state
provides for both state and human security: Figure 2 shows some typical features of good SSG that frequently feature in SSR.

### Figure 2: Typical features of good SSG

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<tr>
<th>The use of force is defined by a legal framework</th>
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<tr>
<td>Publicly known laws, policies and strategies set out when the use of force on behalf of the state is legitimate; and the roles and responsibilities of state and non-state security actors are clearly defined, including mechanisms for democratic, civilian control, oversight and sanction.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Control and management of the security sector are institutionalized (not personalized)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Processes for direction, management and oversight are set out by elected or duly appointed civilian authorities within legitimate democratic institutions that practise accountable and transparent financial management and promote respect for human rights. The personal interest of the office holder is not a factor in control, management or decision-making.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Security sector institutions have sufficient capacity to fulfil their missions effectively and sustainably</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The security sector has the structures, personnel, equipment and resources necessary to fulfil the legitimate security needs of both the state and the individuals and communities that make up the population.</td>
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<tr>
<th>The mandates and missions of different private and public security actors are clear and distinct</th>
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<tr>
<td>Unambiguous and transparent arrangements for interaction, coordination and cooperation between security sector actors are defined according to their legal roles and responsibilities.</td>
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<tr>
<th>The security sector functions according to a culture of public service</th>
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<tr>
<td>In every aspect of their duty, security sector actors promote unity, integrity, discipline, impartiality, equality and respect for the human rights of all individuals and their communities.</td>
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Since the principles that SSR seeks to apply to the security sector are the fundamental tenets of democratic governance, it should also be clear that SSR is always part and parcel of a larger social and political process of democratisation. Thus, the scope for SSR always depends on the overall political situation and on the extent to which political will and popular demand for more democratic governance exists. Where democratic space is limited, the scope for SSR will also be limited regardless of the nature of SSR programming. At the same time, however, limited SSR can play a role in deepening processes of democratisation by seeking to restrict the use of force to legitimate
constitutional functions. Pragmatic expectations for what SSR can achieve must always be rooted in the realities of each political context.

Seeking ways to apply the principles of good governance to the security sector generates an ambitious and potentially vast agenda comprising a wide range of activities. While every context is unique, features of reform that reflect progress can include the following:

- **Support to improve oversight, management and control mechanisms within the security sector in order to increase capacity for accountability**: such support can tackle a range of issues within the institutions of management or oversight as well as within security forces themselves. Entry-points might include, for example, rethinking internal accountability mechanisms, ensuring fiscal integrity and sustainability of security sector spending or institutionalising training and reporting on human rights.

- **Supporting the development of existing functional capacity for good security governance that does not rely on externally sourced institutional models**: one of the greatest challenges in reform is finding ways to engage non-state security and justice providers, such as commercial security actors, customary authorities or grassroots security and justice providers. SSR programming that works from the bottom up to adapt the principles of good governance to local institutional realities will have greater chances of affecting sustainable change in the interests of human security.

- **Supporting civil society and media to increase knowledge and resources, as well as organisation to act effectively**: Constructive civil society engagement in a structured and well organised way has been one of the most consistently influential levers of change in the norms and practices of state security provision across a range of reform contexts but especially in places where public oversight institutions tend to be weak. Supporting knowledge and organisational capacity among civil society and media actors with an interest in public oversight of security can have positive effects on SSG both immediately and over the longer term.

- **Broadening the basis for SSR support through public relations and information campaigns**: Public participation through national dialogues and consultations has a twin effect of educating the public as to what they should expect of security providers while also creating a benchmark against which reformist governments can be held accountable. Opening up public dialogue to security issues helps to dismantle reserved domains by breaking taboos on addressing state security and national defence and it can make security policy more responsive.

- **Strengthening weak legislatures, supporting greater judicial independence and more effective independent oversight institutions**, such as ombuds-institutions, human rights commissions, and anti-corruption commissions. Supporting institutional staff to understand and embrace their role in ensuring effective and accountable security provision, management and oversight is essential to empowering institutions. Similarly, engaging with technical details of building a meritocratic bureaucracy – e.g. finance, human resources, management practices, logistics, and records – can create an empowering institutional environment.

- **Supporting legal reform projects to bring legal architecture governing security provision, control and oversight in line with human rights norms and the rule of law**: Adapting laws to specific contexts, updating outdated legislation, amending existing laws to make them more enforceable, or translating international norms and standards into national legal instruments are
all essential elements of creating a legal framework focussed on human security but also apt to implementation.

Because the SSR concept is so comprehensive, it can appear overwhelming or unrealistic to implement. However, the fact that SSR can imply so many different types of activities does not mean that everything need be tackled at once. It is essential to keep in mind that even though the principles of SSG may be universal, SSR will be different in every context and will change over time in response to changing security environments. Moreover, the range of different activities that can contribute to more accountable and more effective SSG means that SSR can be flexibly adapted to focus on the most promising entry-points of each particular context. The following section examines some of the conventional and emergent challenges of implementing SSR across the great variety of African reform contexts.

3. Old and new challenges

The conventional challenges of SSR in many African contexts relate to the nature of existing security sectors where legacies of colonial and post-colonial statehood created autocratic and illegitimate political systems. The security sector has been a tool for resource extraction and population control in support of regime security. The fact that the executive and the security forces maintain a tight hold over the reins of power and over security affairs has had three distinct effects on the wider security sector governance environment: first, the political class beyond the presidential circle found little interest in discussing or attempting to influence security decision-making (helping to account for the notable pattern of weak legislatures across Africa); second, a tight hold on power created a wall between the security services and popular concerns over security; and third, isolating the security sector in the hands of a narrow political base generated a climate of suspicion among security ‘insiders’ over any role for perceived domestic ‘outsiders’ in security sector governance.

Gaps between the role played by the state security sector and people’s security needs are amply illustrated by the phenomenon of security privatisation. On the one hand, community-based non-state security providers organise themselves in various ways to meet the self-protection needs of communities. On the other hand, commercial security providers, of both national and international origin, supply security on a market basis to those with the means to pay for it. These different faces of the privatisation of security are an essential part of Africa’s security governance picture.

Improving state security provision in this context is not just a matter of technical reform, training or equipment. The fundamental challenge of SSR in Africa is to promote democratic civilian control: empowering the legislative and judicial branches of government; tackling the overlapping roles and missions of the security sector; and finally, reimagining security not as a state secret or the reserved domain of politico- and security-elites but as a sphere of public service in which all people whose security is at stake have a right to contribute. Mali’s sudden democratic reversal and subsequent conflict in 2012 is just one compelling example of the consequences of failing to address reserved domains in the security sector. The number of African states emerging from war further illustrates the perils of failing to tackle these challenges. Post-conflict environments offer some of the most challenging contexts for SSR, yet the post-conflict era can also stir popular demand for comprehensive change in SSG at a time when international resources are aligned to assist. Whilst
not always the case, this is a reason that international and national cooperation in post-conflict SSR has been a catalyst of some of the most dramatic changes in the fundamentals of SSG, for example in Sierra Leone, Liberia or Burundi.

The ‘old’ challenges of civilian democratic control have regained salience as causes or contributing factors to new challenges. As globalisation has strengthened both licit and illicit trade, communication and transport links between different countries coupled with porous borders have come to pose unprecedented challenges to national defence and internal security. Problems such as maritime piracy and trafficking in people, rare animals, weapons, and drugs – frequently managed by globalised organised criminal networks – have taken on new proportions exacerbated by weak governance and corruption in the security sector. In recent years, the activities of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria and the broader Lake Chad basin, the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda and the broader Great Lakes region, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad in Mali, or al-Shabab in Somalia and the Horn of Africa demonstrated the threat that internal insurgencies might quickly come to pose at national and regional levels where national security forces are ineffective. At the same time, terrorist attacks in Mali, Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Kenya and other places showed how global agendas of violent extremism can quickly gain traction in contexts where poor governance creates a sense of political grievance and a weak national security apparatus is unable to offer protection or effective defence.

The threat of terrorism and violent extremism has triggered an increase in security cooperation. In East Africa rates of security and military assistance, in particular from the United States, have increased precipitously with a view to strengthening counter-terrorism and intelligence capacity as well as border control. Similarly, external security assistance has been directed to increasing the ability of national militaries to suppress internal threats of insurgency, as for example with US security assistance to Nigeria, French assistance to Mali, US assistance to Uganda, and international attempts to train and equip forces in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Chad, among others. While these efforts may counter legitimate threats to state and human insecurity, they are also problematic from the perspective of good security governance because they increase the capacity of the state for violence without addressing the conditions under which force will be used.

Applying the principles of good governance to the security sector, and thereby strengthening the framework for democratic governance, rule of law and respect for human rights is a credible and legitimate element of attempts to counter violent extremism and address fragility more broadly. It is in this vein that the Sustainable Development Goals include global goal 16 dedicated to peace, justice and strong institutions, including through support to developing countries to enhance their capacity to counter-terrorism (see in particular target 16a). The same logic justified recent changes to ODA rules whereby a larger range of security and military assistance activities now qualify for inclusion in development budgets. However, this tightening relationship between security and development in the implementation of SSR represents both an opportunity and a danger. Opportunity lies in recognising the role of dysfunctional, unaccountable and abusive security forces in perpetuating grievances that fuel violent extremism, and in using this recognition as a powerful rationale to apply the principles of good governance to the security sector. Danger lies in misdirecting development assistance to focus on narrow issues of security sector capacity without regard for the wider context of democratic governance, thereby increasing the likelihood of ineffective interventions that buttress abusive regimes. Whether SSR support is used to improve or
to undermine human security in this new context of counter-terrorism, countering violent extremism and increased security and military aid will depend on how the principles of good governance and SSR are translated into effective programming.

4. Enabling governance-driven reform processes

Perhaps the most visible sign of positive change in security sector governance dynamics is a process of dialogue between government, security forces, civil society actors and the public on security matters. Participative national dialogue processes create important dynamics for change, reducing uncertainty, building confidence and easing the way for compromise solutions. Consultative processes are essential in order to engage reform-minded elements within the security sector. For security services, reform may appear as a threat to their position, status and expertise. This problem indicates that attempted reforms have rarely taken into account the rights of security personnel or emphasized the benefits that accrue to security institutions through improved effectiveness and accountability: ironically, SSR may be least understood amongst the constituencies who stand to benefit most directly from the shift to democratic security governance. Dialogue about pernicious practices such as promotions based on patronage, poor terms and conditions or mistreatment of veterans can overcome misunderstandings and help channel legitimate concerns to build a broad coalition of support for change. These are crucial steps in forging links of trust between citizens and security providers.

Current approaches to SSR tend to neglect this essential bridge-building process, instead emphasising visible changes in security provision from physical infrastructure and equipment through to new institutions or systems. This approach also tends to neglect the essential roles of legislatures and judiciaries as well as organs of independent oversight, civil society, media and the public itself in shaping security policies, reform agendas and their implementation.

Local ownership resting on a high level of meaningful participation by domestic stakeholders is the bedrock of sustainable SSR programmes in Africa. The principle of local ownership in SSR has in some cases been misinterpreted to mean that initiatives must have a high level of domestic political support. This is simply wrong: what is required is not local support for externally-driven programmes and projects but rather external support for the programmes and projects initiated and endorsed by local actors. International partners can neither ‘design’ nor ‘implement’ SSR sustainably; rather, in response to local demand, they can only seek to support and facilitate efforts at the national level to address the organizational change and political challenges central to SSR. Experience in many contexts has proven that externally imposed models of security or templates for reform rarely succeed in their immediate aims and quickly crumble once international support wanes.

Entry points

5 For seminal works on local ownership in SSR see: Laurie Nathan, No Ownership, No Commitment: A Guide to Local Ownership of Security Sector Reform (Birmingham: University of Birmingham 2007) and Tim Donais, ed., Local Ownership and Security Sector Reform (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2008).
Opportunities exist to support reform constituencies and address gaps in current SSR programming. These entry points are further explored in the Think Pieces that complement this Background Paper and which are intended to frame discussions during the Learning Lab.

- **Giving research its due**: A major challenge to promoting SSR in many African contexts is the absence of a discourse on security issues. A cursory examination of the SSR literature will show the preponderance of research from the Global North. Supporting African-driven research is important in itself and can translate into greater focus on the security sector among the media and civil society more broadly. Empowering young African researchers can make a critical contribution in this respect.

- **Bringing in the private**: The dynamics of non-state security and justice provision need to be integrated into SSR approaches and most especially in African contexts where the state is not the only nor in most cases the most important or most trusted security provider. A realistic assessment of reform needs is not possible without an understanding of how non-state security providers are meeting general everyday needs for security and justice in the absence of a people-centred state security sector.

- **Empowering civil society and media**: Civil society and media play an essential part in a meaningful and open public dialogue around security sector governance. The essential operative role played by civil society and media in channelling and giving voice to public concern underlines their importance as change agents in reform processes. Beyond the pressure generated through advocacy, a significant role can be played by civil society in injecting new thinking into policy debates. This includes providing direct feedback on peoples’ security needs, constituting a de facto accountability mechanism holding governments to deliver on reform promises, and acting as a trust building mechanism by managing expectations and sharing information.

- **Creating network effects**: Transnational civil-society-based expert groups have become increasingly important actors in supporting post-conflict and democratic transitions in Africa and can help support this goal. A major development is the increased networking of actors and capacities. African led networks can offer input to policy processes, facilitation of national dialogue, and expert support. Their role and impact may be most crucial in those contexts where civil society activism at the national level is repressed by providing an alternative outlet for advocacy beyond the reach of state abuse of force. Using these networks in support of international SSR efforts is important for accessing African knowledge and expertise. Leveraging experience from within and across different regions of Africa provides a compelling dynamic to support behaviour change in different contexts. This means that both national authorities and the wider international community can draw much more readily on national and regional expertise to facilitate the context-specific approach that is so crucial to successful SSR. This resource should be used a lot more by bilateral donors and multilateral organisations in this field.

- **Investing in capacity-building**: a key plank of local ownership is the fostering of national capacities for security provision, management and oversight. Weak line ministries contribute to ‘self-governed’ security institutions that reinforce corporatist behaviour creating an urgent need
to strengthen human resource, and financial and general management capacities. This means that some of the most crucial and potentially transformative elements of SSR may come in the form of apparently banal and technocratic activities like strengthening record-keeping, accounting, or procurement processes within security sector management bodies. A mentoring approach necessary to support national capacity building places particular emphasis on skills transfer. South-South cooperation in promoting SSR offers a more promising route since stakeholders that have already traversed the challenges of a reform process have both pragmatic experience and moral authority to speak.

- **Improving oversight**: Support for improved security sector oversight remains under-emphasised and under-resourced. Parliamentary capacity development is a priority area of SSR activity in many African contexts because of historically dominant executives. Focussing on parliamentary support, including staff development and committee functions as well as individual representatives, can help ensure that legislators are sufficiently informed and resourced to make use of their legal authority to oversee security affairs. Targeting the institution for support in addition to individual representatives can ensure that gains are made beyond the short-term time horizon of electoral cycles. Training on parliaments’ roles in security issues for media, wider government staff, and political parties is essential for long term improvements in security oversight across the branches of government.

- **Addressing gender inequalities** in the delivery and oversight of security services: Gender equality is an international norm that stipulates the equal right of women, men and gender minorities to access opportunities and resources, regardless of the sex with which they were born and the gender with which they identify. In the context of the security sector, this means that women, men and gender minorities should have equal opportunities to participate in the provision, management and oversight of security services. It also means that the security needs of women, men, boys, girls and gender minorities should be considered equally and effectively responded to. Gender equality is an integral part of each of the principles of good governance of the security sector and a prerequisite to the success and sustainability of any security sector reform strategy.

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### 5. Conclusion

Fuelled by an apparently disappointing track record, scepticism about the realistic feasibility of SSR has grown since the concept was first developed. Such criticisms tend to reflect overly ambitious visions of what “success” in SSR amounts to in the context of larger processes of transition toward democracy, development and peace. Disappointment about the scale and speed of transformative change through SSR fails to engage with the facts that states do not transition from autocratic governance to wealthy liberal democracies within the so-called “post-conflict” or “post-transition” phases; that political transitions do not follow a linear progression from less free to more free; and that development itself is a highly contentious process whereby changes in the distribution of wealth within a society cause tension and conflict, which sometimes leads to violence. Thus, success in SSR must be defined by the extent to which the principles of democratic governance are
increasingly applied to the security sector and not by the extent to which institutions have come to match the form and function of those found in other wealthier, more peaceful countries. For SSR, the fact that success may lie well over the horizon means that in the short- to medium-term realistic expectations of reform need to focus on relative progress and promising improvements instead of swift transformations and far distant goals. Finally, these insights also make clear that the success of SSR cannot be judged by the trajectory of democratisation and transition as a whole. Although SSR targets an important aspect of democratic governance, it is only one aspect of it and other, unrelated, political and social factors will have defining effects on the overall trajectory of transition in general and SSR in particular. Integrating the very real likelihood of democratic setbacks and reversals into SSR approaches is a necessary reality check for pragmatic programming and realistic expectations of short- to medium-term progress. Democratic governance, rule of law and the guarantee of human rights are worthy ideals that no society anywhere in the world realises in full. SSR can strengthen democratic governance, the rule of law and the protection of human rights, but where it succeeds it will be a slow process realised in small increments of relative progress.

If the ambitious goals of the SSR policy agenda are to be realized, a change in focus is required. Too often SSR tends to be confined to ‘institutional reform’ of the state security sector as opposed to a focus on how individuals and communities experience security and justice. The ultimate measure of success in SSR should be the subjective experience of security for the population. Successful SSR improves how security is experienced by people according to a set of principles based on democratic governance, rule of law and human rights. Placing individuals at the centre of an SSR process permits a better assessment of the security situation in a given context through addressing the different security needs and perceptions of women and men, boys and girls.

Moreover, SSR approaches need to reflect the reality that in many African contexts security and justice is provided by a wide range of non-state actors when the state is unwilling or unable to fulfil this role. Including both state and non-state security and justice providers in reform approaches is a matter of pragmatism since these actors are an inevitable feature of the security governance landscape. However, including the grass roots interests of the beneficiaries of security and justice provision is also necessary in order to meaningfully apply principles of inclusion, participation, transparency and social accountability in SSR. From this perspective, national ownership of SSR means building reform coalitions at the level of national political authority and throughout the organs of representative government. Furthermore, it means including media, civil society, as well as community interests and traditional or customary security and justice providers into the process.

While SSR remains a challenging agenda to implement, it is clear that there is no alternative to SSR in the sense that no state and no society can avoid striking some kind of balance between accountability and effectiveness in its security sector: the defining question is whether the balance struck will be in the interests of human security or not. SSR is best understood as an effort to tilt the balance in favour of human security. In this context, there are both a clear need and clear opportunities that can be seized to bridge the enduring gap between governance-driven policy aspirations and SSR implementation, which in practice has fallen short of these important objectives.