Security and safety from the bottom up: hybrid security governance

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The challenge

Prevailing approaches to SSR - and the associated policy literature - have tended to stress Westphalian notions of the state characterized by legal-rational norms and institutions. Thus, SSR processes have more often than not concentrated on the formal arrangements of the state and its security and justice institutions, focusing on tangible policy goals such as stronger mechanisms of civilian control, better budgetary management of security spending, training and professionalization, police and courts reforms, mechanisms of parliamentary accountability, or the provision of alternative livelihoods for ex-combatants. Yet, such approaches are fundamentally at variance with the underlying realities of the African context, where many political and social transactions (not least in the security sector) take place in the context of informal norms and systems, and where a wide array of institutions operate alongside or within nominally formal political institutions.

Implications for SSR/G

This may well account for many of the limitations of efforts to reform the security sector and its governance systems. In fact, the efficiency of SSR policies conducted on the African continent often turns out to be limited because they tend to focus mostly on state institutions, governmental established stakeholders, legal frameworks and codified standards. Although understanding and controlling the state dimension remains essential, the complexity of Africa's socio-political and security dynamics calls inseparably for a deep understanding of societal realities, often informal, within which security governance in Africa is rooted. Furthermore, analysis of recent crises that have occurred in many African countries involving the security apparatus demonstrates the need to better understand the societal and cultural context within which SSR policies are implemented. Increasingly, references to the informal security and justice sector have crept into the SSR and 'state-building' toolkits, although so far based upon insufficient empirical understanding of how this sector actually functions in the political and security marketplace, or of the complex interplay between formal and informal institutions, which determine how policies play out on the ground and impact (or not) on the lives of citizens and communities. On the African continent formal and informal systems tend to overlap, interrelate, and interpenetrate at complex levels and states and informal networks are not mutually exclusive but should rather be seen as embedded in each other.

There is consequently a need to identify this complex amalgam of formal and informal networks, actors and processes which, alongside legally established structures, influence decision-making as well as policy implementation in the security sector and which together constitute what can be seen as "hybrid security orders". Analysis and policy have scarcely begun to touch upon the deep politics of reform or to draw in any systematic way upon the critical literatures on hybrid political orders and security. By relying on the perspectives offered by sociology and anthropology in the daily functioning of security provision (both at the central and local levels), the analysis of hybrid security governance should provide new and refreshing insights on networks and alliances as well as on competition, tensions, and conflicts within African defence and security services which may help to explain the difficulties in implementing SSR processes. Such an approach is likely to offer decision-makers a key input to understanding non state stakeholders, non-official networks and non-codified standards, whose influence compete against or to the contrary complete the intervention perimeter of state institutions and legal frameworks. It may also serve to explain how hybrid security systems are experienced at the grass roots by supposed beneficiaries, and in particular how they impact the lives of vulnerable groups and shape citizen expectations of security and security entitlements. Finally, by putting an emphasis on parameters very rarely taken into account, such an investigation of "hybrid security orders" suggests a new approach to SSR processes, focused on trends that shape profoundly African societies. In addition to contributing to strengthening the research and evidence base of SSR, this approach carries important policy implications for how we approach security governance in Africa. In this regard, the ultimate

intent is go beyond the use of 'hybridity' as an analytical tool to inquire as to the extent to which the concept can provide the underpinnings of an approach to building more effective security and security governance systems and inform the agendas of partners who wish to participate in programs aimed at reaching this objective.

Entry points for engagement

There has been a recent flowering of interest in security and justice provision beyond the confines of the state. This stems in part from the perception that state security and justice institutions are failing in their core functions and lack legitimacy and public support. Yet we still have an incomplete understanding of how these non-state institutions function. The task of building democratically governed and effective security sectors must be built on a deep knowledge of all the actors involved particularly informal actor whose behaviour and activities can be decisive on the outcome. Some entry points can therefore be to:

Map out the informal actors of the security sector and their role as well as informal norms, solidarities and networks as embedded in the official security and justice institutions: Actors in these institutions do not necessarily follow bureaucratic [rational-legal] rules or deliver according to their official mandates. Their decisions tend to be influenced instead by prevailing power relations, by various forms of patronage, by the social networks in which they are immersed and by alternative norms and codes of behaviour framed in the language of 'custom', 'tradition' or 'religion'. There is a need to provide an understanding of the socially embedded forms of reciprocity, which inform leadership, recruitment, promotion and social networks both in and beyond the security sector. Keen knowledge of these is determinant to success in SSR/G programs and they should in particular be taken into account by SSR assessment missions.

Endeavour to build capacity in these informal actors to orient their activities in the security and justice sector and their interface with the formal security institutions of the state toward support, and not hindrance, of SSG: Case studies of particular non-state security and justice bodies can lead to a better understanding of, for example, the claim that vigilante groups, militias, faith-based militants and criminal mafias etc in some cases offer credible protection and are seen as legitimate by local communities, but also of their wider impacts in eroding the state's monopoly of legitimate violence, on the rule of law and on human rights.

Help in developing empirically grounded programs and policies to address the impact of hybrid security orders on the security and entitlements of citizens, in particular on vulnerable and excluded people and communities: Research should aim to identify empirically which hybrid processes on the one hand foster inclusion and accountability; and which on the other hand reinforce exclusion and violence and impede the emergence of good security governance practices. The concept of hybridity could potentially encourage rethinking of the entire basis of security, justice and legitimate public authority. The ambition should be to provide a better empirical understanding of how and for whom oversight mechanisms work in situations where parallel channels of influence and informal networks actually determine the allocation of resources and security provision. Hybridity should be integrated in programme design (e.g. human resources policies, legal frameworks).

Help in the design of oversight as well as monitoring and evaluation processes (formalizing indicators taking into account informality) that for example would include non-state actors into all the democratic oversight and monitoring and evaluation functions of parliaments, and other oversight institutions.

Questions for discussion:

1. How does the concept of "hybrid Security orders" fit in the conceptualization of Security in Africa?
2. How can informality and the agency of grass-roots be taken into account in the SSR/G?
3. How can anti-terrorist efforts take into account "hybridity"?