

A Beginner's Guide to Security Sector Reform (SSR)

This guide serves as an introduction to SSR and suggests some key sources for further reading. It is available as a downloadable document from www.ssrnetwork.net along with a [database of key UK and international actors in SSR](#) and a [comprehensive SSR acronyms list](#), which form useful complementary reading to this guide.

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What is SSR?

The objective of SSR is to create a secure environment that is conducive to development, poverty reduction, good governance and, in particular, the growth of democratic states and institutions based on the rule of law. This relies on the ability of the state to mitigate its people's vulnerabilities through development, and to use a range of policy instruments to prevent or address security threats that affect society's well-being. This includes establishing appropriate civilian oversight of security actors. Hence, a broader range of state institutions is now being considered in the provision of security, with the military seen as one instrument among many. The 'security sector' includes traditional security actors such as the armed forces and police; oversight bodies such as the executive and legislature; civil society organisations; justice and law enforcement institutions such as the judiciary and prisons; as well as non-state security providers.

Some commonly used definitions of SSR

The [Global Conflict Prevention Pool \(GCPP\)](#) defines SSR as:

"SSR is a broad concept that covers a wide spectrum of disciplines, actors and activities. In its simplest form, SSR addresses security-related policy, legislation, structural and oversight issues, all set within recognised democratic norms and principles." (Department for International Development, Ministry of Defence and Foreign Commonwealth Office, 2004)

The [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Development Assistance Committee \(OECD-DAC\)](#) defines SSR as:

"Security system reform (SSR) seeks to increase partner countries' ability to meet the range of security needs within their societies in a manner consistent with democratic norms and sound principles of governance, transparency and the rule of law. SSR includes, but extends well beyond, the narrower focus of more traditional security assistance on defence, intelligence and policing." (OECD, 2004)

How has SSR developed? How is it a part of the International Development Agenda?

The SSR policy agenda has developed over the past 15 years as the traditional concept of security has been modified. During the Cold War, SSR concerns were seen as secondary to which sides ruling groups took in the East-West conflict. Development practitioners largely avoided security issues, which were inevitably bound up with political ideologies, and security policy focussed on the protection of states from military threats and, very often, providing illegitimate regimes with illegitimate support.

Since the end of the Cold War concerns have changed and security challenges have become more complex. It is now recognised that states have often failed to fulfil their security obligations, or have even actively compromised the security of their own people. Consequently, the security agenda has broadened to include the well-being of populations and human rights, SSR being part of the wider 'human security' framework. In this context, security and development have become increasingly linked – international security actors have realised that their short-term operations will not bring sustainable benefit without coordinating their activities with longer-term development work. Similarly, development practitioners have realised that it is impractical to consider development without taking security issues into account.

Violence and security are a priority concern of the poor and other vulnerable groups, especially women and children, who are often subject to bad policing, weak justice and corrupt militaries. Security is also intrinsic to personal and state safety, access to government services and participation in political processes. SSR contributes to the development of appropriate structures to help prevent instability and violent conflict. It can contribute to creating the conditions necessary for economic and social development and the protection of human rights and is therefore a prerequisite to achieving the [Millennium Development Goals](#).

The UK Government has a collaborative approach that attempts to combine the knowledge, expertise and experience of the [Department for International Development](#), the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#), and the [Ministry of Defence](#).

Other bilateral and multilateral institutions also recognise the potential of SSR. In June 2006 the EU adopted an SSR policy and began work on the practicalities of its implementation later that year. Similarly, the UN views SSR as an integral part of its preventative approach to conflict.

Core principles and associated challenges of implementing SSR

The [OECD DAC](#) has agreed on a number of working principles for SSR:

- *People-centred, locally-owned and based on democratic norms and human rights principles and the rule of law, seeking to provide freedom from fear.*
- *Seen as a framework to structure thinking about how to address diverse security challenges facing states and their populations through more integrated development and security policies and through greater civilian involvement and oversight.*

- *Founded on activities with multi-sectoral strategies, based on a broad assessment of the range of security needs of the people and the state.*
- *Developed adhering to basic principles underlying public sector reform such as transparency and accountability.*
- *Implemented through clear processes and policies that aim to enhance the institutional and human capacity needed for security policy to function effectively.*

The literature reveals that there are also a number of associated challenges involved in the implementation of SSR:

- It can be difficult to find local ownership for SSR, especially where it is most needed, for example where security forces are part of the problem or where SSR may have the potential to change current power relationships.
- SSR is expensive and human resource intensive – it requires the cooperation of a wide range of actors and expertise from a range of different governmental departments and non-governmental institutions.
- SSR includes a wide range of activities and can be deployed in support of a number of key objectives. This can often lead to inconsistencies and unevenness in implementation. The challenge is to provide a consistent and coherent overall framework with some form of prioritisation to avoid a mixed bag of ad hoc activities.
- SSR takes a long-time to bring about changes, which may deter donors from engaging in this type of work.

The Global Conflict Prevention Pool's Security Sector Reform Strategy

The GCPP's SSR Strategy provides the GCPP and the [Africa Conflict Prevention Pool \(ACPP\)](#) with a central base for resources, policy advice and information on SSR.

The Strategy recognises the need to influence thinking and develop understanding of SSR among conflict prevention pool partners – across Whitehall and internationally. To achieve this it focuses on four key outputs:

- analysis and research for policy development;
- effective institutional reform;
- capacity building; and
- mainstreaming and international influencing.

The Strategy has provided the funding for two key resources – the [Security Sector Development Advisory Team \(SSDAT\)](#) and [GFN-SSR](#). These bodies enable GCPP geographical strategies to access the support they require to plan effective SSR programmes on the ground, notably in Jamaica, Uganda and Sierra Leone where the UK has taken the lead in promoting SSR. Funding from the Strategy has also (in part through GFN-SSR) provided practical support to the establishment of regional networks of civil society groups, academics, parliamentarians and government officials, building their capacity to understand and advocate SSR needs.

The Strategy also funds places on Defence Education programmes which are aimed at developing professional and democratic Armed Forces; underpinned by transparent governance regimes. As well as complementing other SSR initiatives

and building regional confidence, these programmes facilitate wider engagement where entry points have been limited.

Funding for the Strategy amounted to £6.25 million in financial year 06/07 and the same amount has been allocated for 07/08.

What are the areas of SSR engagement?

SSR engagement necessitates a multisectoral approach including defence, intelligence, policing, prisons, civil society, civilian oversight, financial management, and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR). Further details on each of these sectors are provided in the corresponding sections below.

Where can I find further sources of information on aspects of SSR?

The following texts provide a useful introduction to the SSR policy agenda:

SSR: General

- [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005, 'Introduction to Security Sector Reform', Development Assistance Committee, OECD, Paris](#)
Security sector reform (SSR) is fundamentally important to effective conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It helps ensure and sustain the stability necessary for development. This Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) paper summarises key SSR programme design and implementation issues. Emphasising effective and democratically accountable institutions, SSR provides a framework to develop strategies to meet a nationally-defined vision of security and development needs.
- [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004, 'Security System Reform and Governance: Policy and Good Practice', Development Assistance Committee \(DAC\) Guidelines and Reference Document, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\), Paris](#)
How do you foster through governance reforms a secure environment that is conducive to poverty reduction and sustainable development? What are the key components of security? These are questions that are addressed in this publication by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The research suggests that the traditional concept of security is being redefined. The document sets out the key concepts of security system reform (SSR) and suggests ways to support it in developing countries.

Defence

Armed forces need to respond to the strategic context by building militarily effective institutions, whilst also ensuring that they remain responsive to the legitimate demands of a democratic society. A major challenge for civilian and military leaders is to strike a balance between these (sometimes competing) requirements. It is also important to take account of the history and traditions of individual armed forces, which are normally critical factors in maintaining their identity, sense of shared purpose and morale. However, these should not stand in the way of achieving efficiency, effectiveness, affordability, duty, political

neutrality, human rights, justice and the development of civilian control through democratic institutions.

- [Chuter, D., 2000, 'Defence Transformation: a Short Guide to the Issues', ISS Monograph no. 49, Pretoria](#)

How have nations adapted their defence policies to the post-Cold War world? What is required to manage armed forces effectively in a democracy? This Institute for Security Studies (ISS) paper provides a practical guide to defence transformation, beginning with fundamental questions about the role and place of the military in civil society. It argues that defence transformation is not a single process with a generic blueprint; rather it must be an organic process that grows out of each country's particular circumstances.

Intelligence

Intelligence services play a vital role in protecting national security, but it is important that they should be subject to appropriate democratic civilian oversight. Such oversight is necessary to provide appropriate checks on their power, and also to ensure that the need for these services to operate clandestinely does not conflict with the principle of transparent democratic governance. They should derive their existence and powers from legislation, and the use of special powers should be grounded in law. The executive exercises direct control, determines the budget and sets general guidelines and priorities for the intelligence services. The judiciary should oversee the use of their special powers, and judges should prosecute any wrongdoing.

- [Hannah, G., O'Brien, K. and Rathmell, A., 2005, 'Intelligence and Security Legislation for Security Sector Reform', RAND Europe, Cambridge](#)

What choices are required when designing and implementing legislative oversight of intelligence and security services? This RAND report provides an opportunity to learn from the successes and failures of intelligence and security legislation in various countries. Case studies from the UK, Canada, South Africa, Germany, the Czech Republic and Argentina provide a balance between developed and developing countries alongside evolutionary versus revolutionary intelligence reforms.

Policing

The main objectives of SSR from a policing perspective are to increase respect for human rights and to provide greater security for citizens, rather than focus exclusively on the security of the state. In countries making the transition from authoritarian government or violent conflict, a particular priority in the short-term can be to 'demilitarise' the police. This often means ensuring a clear functional differentiation between a heavily armed, unified military, physically separated from the population; and a community based police service which focuses on local needs policing rather than act entirely as an agent of the state. This is a precondition for establishing democracy and providing a favourable environment for economic development. For further information on the role of the police in facilitating improved security and access to justice, please visit the [GSDRC website](#).

- [Ziegler, M. and Nield, R. 2001, 'From Peace to Governance: Police Reform and the International Community', Washington Office on Latin America \(WOLA\)](#)

This report summarises the findings of a conference, 'Police Reform and the International Community: From Peace Processes to Democratic Governance'. Despite the political risks, the positive aspects of police reform have encouraged donors to participate. Police reform can support demilitarisation and democratisation, boost economic growth, reduce

poverty, and improve respect for human rights. However, case studies from Central and South America and South Africa highlight the difficulty of achieving reform where violent crime is on the rise.

Civilian Oversight

Civilian oversight and accountability is needed to ensure that state-military relations are conducive to democratic politics and that human security is promoted as well as national security. This can be difficult to achieve where there are complex technical issues, vested interests and a culture of secrecy at stake. Approaches in this area often include building the capacity and expertise of a variety of state institutions, including governments, legislatures, judicial institutions, ombudsmen and complaints bodies. Non-state actors can also play an important role.

- [Born, H., Fluri, P., and Lunn, S., \(eds.\) 2003, 'Oversight and Guidance: The Relevance of Parliamentary Oversight for the Security Sector and its Reform: A Collection of Articles on Foundational Aspects of Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector', DCAF/NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Geneva](#)

Security policy is widely believed to be the task of the executive. Parliaments are regarded as less suitable for making security decisions. This paper from the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) argues that parliamentary oversight of the security sector and its reform is in the interest of democracy and security. Security sector reform creates systematic accountability and transparency on the premise of increased democratic control, placing it within the context of the good governance agenda.

Civil Society

The term 'civil society' is often used with imprecision, but is generally understood to encompass areas of activity that take place outside of the state's direct control. It includes a wide range of actors, including non-governmental organisations, grassroots, professional, religious and labour organisations and groups, as well as the media. The security sector has historically proven one of the most resistant to public input, and a major objective of SSR is to make the sector more accountable to citizens and communities, and more responsive to their needs. Civil society can play an important role in encouraging the state to fulfil its responsibilities transparently and accountably. This can be through a range of functions including advocacy, monitoring, policy support and service delivery.

- [Ball, N. and Brzoska, M., 2002, 'Voice and Accountability in the Security Sector', Bonn International Centre for Conversion, Bonn](#)

Why is security important in human development? How can the security sector be held accountable? This paper from the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) discusses the need to keep the security sector accountable and under democratic, civil control. It argues for civil oversight, transparency, respect between civil authorities and security forces, and commitment from country leadership.

Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR)

The disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants into peacetime economic and social life is essential for restoring security. It can be an important part of SSR during transitions to peace, although it sometimes takes place before any SSR intervention begins. DDR programmes are complex and include political negotiations, humanitarian relief, the technical aspects of weapon

disposal and socio-economic interventions to provide livelihoods, training and skills.

- [Douglas, I. et al, 2004, 'Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration: A Practical Field and Classroom Guide', GTZ, NODEFIC, PPC and SNDC](#)
Successful programmes for the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants are essential for sustainable peace and development. There are a variety of specific instruments and approaches that can support DDR programmes when adapted to the implementation conditions of particular countries. This training book aims to support effective planning by providing a comprehensive overview of all aspects of DDR operations. It is a product of the partnership between the Swedish National Defence College (SNDC), the Norwegian Defence International Centre (FOKIV), the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre (PPC), and the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ).

Financial Management

Reform of inefficient and unaccountable security sector expenditure is important for democratic control and for effective use of public finances. The security sector can often be an active breeding ground for financial corruption in developing countries. Reform includes encouraging governments to make sure that security expenditure forms part of the standard public resource allocation and management process; that it is transparent and affordable; and that resources are allocated according to priorities within the security sector and between sectors. 'Right-sizing' the security sector aims to ensure that expenditure is appropriate, and does not divert resources needlessly from other areas such as development. Tackling corruption in all sectors of government activity is important, including the security sector.

- [Hendrickson, D. and Ball, N. 2002, 'Off-budget Military Expenditure and Revenue: Issues and Policy Perspectives for Donors', Conflict Security and Development Group Occasional Papers](#)
Off-budget military expenditure is more widespread than is generally recognised. It is a significant problem for both developing countries and the donor community as it undermines macro-economic stability and efforts to promote poverty reduction, and is also an indicator that there are accountability problems with the military.