

The African Security Sector Network (ASSN)

Background to the ASSN

The African Security Sector Network (ASSN) was created at Elmina, Ghana in November 2003, out of a recognition of the need to harmonise the activities of the various African organisations working in the area of security sector reform (or transformation) and governance. The ASSN is founded on the perception (widely shared) that management and governance of security in Africa have been and continue to be deeply flawed (for reasons that are both political and technical), that such mis-governance has driven many of the conflicts and human rights abuses that afflict the continent, and constitutes a profound threat to consolidation of Africa's fragile democracies. Reform (if not transformation) of this sector is thus essential if objectives of conflict prevention and management, peace-building, and democratic governance and development are to be achieved on the continent.

Formation of the ASSN also reflects the conviction that civil society organisations (CSOs) and civilian think-tanks are important repositories of knowledge, advocacy and legitimation, and thus an essential element in this transformation process. Nevertheless, the ASSN does not see itself as a 'civil society organisation' in the conventional sense, but rather as a multidisciplinary network spanning academics, think-tanks, civil society organisations (CSOs), security practitioners, members of parliament, and so on. A principal objective is to bridge the gap between these stakeholders while harnessing their collective expertise, and enabling sharing of experiences between different traditions of security organisation and practice (anglophone, francophone and lusophone). The network derives its core strength from its diverse competencies, and the corresponding ability to engage a broad range of security actors (including policy-and decision-makers) within a framework that facilitates dialogue, exchange of experiences and lesson learning.

However, we also recognise that the political space for CSOs to perform these roles, as well as their ability to do so, may differ very much, depending on context, strategy, capacity and entry point. ASSN thus operates at two levels:

- first, at a horizontal level to empower CSOs across Africa by equipping them with the skills (political as much as technical) required to engage the security sector, in the process creating regional coalitions for change. In addition to south-south linkages, the ASSN has also developed robust formal and informal south-north networking;¹
- second, collaborating with national governments, the AU and regional organisations to build the policy and institutional capacity to address security issues within a democratic and accountable framework.

Vision and Objectives

The driving vision of the ASSN is that of an African security sector that is democratically governed, people-centred, well managed, effective and accountable, and continental, regional

¹ Current partners include the Global Facilitation Network for Security Sector Reform/GFN-SSR, the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces/DCAF, and the OECD-DAC (ASSN members were involved in the genesis of the GFN, and more recently in work on the Implementation-Framework for Security System Reform (IF-SSR) of the DAC). South-south linkages will also be materially enhanced by the new Global Colloquium for Security Transformation, in which ASSN is a founding member.

and national security communities that are self-reliant, able to draw primarily upon indigenous resources and knowledge to support sustainable collective peace and security arrangements.

The ASSN sees itself contributing to this vision by supporting and facilitating security sector reform and governance processes in Africa in a number of ways, including

- Advocacy and facilitation of emerging networks;
- promoting dialogue across a diversity of actors and issue-areas and stimulating informed debate, designed to influence decision-makers and policy processes;
- enhancing security literacy among the continent's policy- and decision-makers, parliamentarians, academics, civil society and the general public through training, education, and dissemination of resource materials;
- supporting policy and institutional development through applied research and provision of advisory and consultancy services;
- building capacity within the security sector (in particular for Parliaments);
- promoting an African-centred focus by disseminating African 'best practices' in the areas of SSR and SSG; and finally by
- serving as a continental information repository

Activities

ASSN carries out a wide range of activities, both at the corporate level and through its member organisations. Current activities include: delivery of high-level courses and seminars in Security Sector Governance and Management in Southern Africa (by SADSEM)² and Ghana (ASDR); a variety of capacity-building programmes for Parliamentarians across the continent; advisory and consultancy services for SSR policy development and design in Liberia, Sudan and Guyana (in addition to collaboration on police reforms in Kenya and Nigeria and defence reforms in Ghana); and work on designing regional SSR strategies by network branches in the Horn and Great Lakes. ASSN also assists with recruitment of African consultants and experts in the SSR area. Although the ASSN has been directly involved in several activities on its own, its main mandate is facilitation (including funding) of the activities of its members. It also operates a website (africansecuritynetwork.org).

Membership

ASSN membership is on both institutional and individual basis, and is open to all who have an active interest in African security sector issues and also subscribe to the core principles of the organisation. The network is governed by a Steering Committee of 6 elected and 10 co-opted members, with a chair and vice-chair (currently Professor Eboe Hutchful of ASDR and Brigadier-General Paulino Macaringue of SADSEM respectively). Key institutional members include African Security Dialogue and Research/ASDR (Ghana—the current HQ of ASSN), the Centre for Democracy and Development/CDD (Nigeria), the Southern African Defence and Security Management Network (SADSEM) (Southern Africa), the Centre for Policy Research and Dialogue/CPRD [Ethiopia], and the Security Research and Information Centre/SRIC [Kenya].

As a pan-African organisation, the ASSN seeks to be comprehensive in terms of both skill-sets and regional and gender representation. Currently, there is a need to attract more women

² SADSEM (the Southern African Defence and Security Management Network) has developed a sophisticated network based on universities across Southern Africa in delivering these courses, and has recently introduced a Masters Programme in Security Governance and Management.

and expand our francophone and lusophone representation as well as develop a presence in North and Central Africa. In terms of disciplines, we have been moderately successful in diversifying away from our original defence focus by increasing our membership with expertise in police and intelligence issues (although more could still be done in both areas), but remain weak in terms of the justice sector in particular.