

Special Collection - New Approaches to SSR in Africa

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Security sector reform (SSR), as it is applied in war-to-peace transitions and broader state building projects, is undergoing a period of change. Over a decade of case study analysis—particularly in conflict-affected environments—has revealed challenges in applying the SSR model outlined in formative documents like the *OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform*. Many of the principal tenets of the SSR model, like its holistic character, focus on governance, and human security orientation have proven difficult to translate into practice.

As a result, there is a renewed interest in SSR programming that is more flexible, sensitive to power dynamics, adaptive, and inclusive of a wide range of actors. The Centre for Security Governance (CSG) has completed several major research projects in this area, including *Exploring the Transition from First to Second Generation SSR in Conflict Affected Societies*, and *Non-State Security Providers and Political Formation in Conflict-Affected Societies*. To continue to pursue these ideas in partnership with key research centers in Africa, the CSG has organized this special collection to disseminate innovative research and promote new policy ideas, with a focus on those generated by African researchers and institutions. This special collection would not have been possible without the support of the Knowledge Platform on Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL) and the partnership with the African Security Sector Network (ASSN).

It is an opportune time to consider the lessons and challenges that have been accumulated since formalized approaches to security and justice sector reform in Africa began in the 1990s. While the ambitions of comprehensive and holistic SSR programs, embedded with local ownership and context-specificity, remain the hallmarks of current programming, there is a dearth of case study evidence supporting the realization of these objectives. Rather, academic and policy literature is filled with country, region and sector specific studies, which generate a largely predictable set of outcomes and recommendations. It is often difficult to see how – or even if – the practice of SSR intervention has evolved.

Mark Sedra observed the emergence of a ‘second generation’ of SSR during which the focus shifted from donor-driven, state-centric and largely technocratic reform efforts to an increased willingness to engage non-state actors, adopting more modest objectives and time frames, increasing the political nature of engagement and integrating bottom-up approaches. In this light, the papers in this special collection could be considered as evaluating the successes and challenges of second generation SSR by looking at cases where bottom-up approaches to security questions are being negotiated (see Lar’s article on Nigeria), cases where formal and informal actors interact and form governance arrangements (see Livermon’s case of South Africa), and cases where the complexity of political change interacts with the needs of reform agendas (see Bangura’s article on police reform in Sierra Leone). Lamb and Stainer further highlight in their paper on coordination in South Sudan, how international actors struggle to coordinate their efforts in complex, multi-actor environments characterized by political fragility.

The papers gathered in this special collection highlight the tensions in promoting informal governance structures. The case studies on secret societies in Sierra Leone (by Fredline M'Cormack-Hale) and justice pathways in Liberia (by Freida Ibiduni M'Cormack) highlight the need for more nuanced understandings of the roles that such actors can play. While there is an assumed positive outcome from including non-state and informal actors to complement and extend state capacity in much of the SSR literature, these case studies highlight rather that security governance and security/ justice provision options emerge from and are forged by interactions between the state and non-state/ formal and informal. By highlighting hybrid governance and the need to include a variety of security and justice sector actors, these authors are moving the SSR debate towards an increased understanding and acceptance of complexity and the need to adopt more flexible approaches.

The articles collected here also highlight the complexity of maintaining and sustaining reform efforts and the unforeseen consequences that interventions can have. For example, the impact of the South African defence reform process and the liberalization of military education on military efficacy is explored by Esterhuizen and Mokoena. For African countries, we are in a unique position of having more than twenty years of intervention experience to draw on to consider impacts and the 'flow' of impacts through complex social systems. Gbla, for example, emphasizes how the lack of focus on informal actors during initial SSR efforts in Sierra Leone has undermined their ability to engage in emerging security crises.

This special collection seeks to move the SSR debate forward by further grounding policy debates in the complex interactions from which governance emerges. SSR interventions remain a key tool for improving security and justice in conflict-affected states and as experience and reflection combine, we hope that policy makers, national actors and civil society actors begin to develop more innovative ways to work at the coalfaces of security and justice sector governance.

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