

5. Stabilization and Security Sector Reform

Key definitions: why stabilization and Security Sector Reform are important security issues?

In societies that have experienced armed violence or war, international assistance to help restore peaceful political processes and the state's capacity to govern are known as 'stabilization'. These efforts can stretch across a spectrum of activities from supporting peace processes and their implementation, capacity development for public administration and assistance to civil society, including media capacity development. Security sector reform (SSR) is an important aspect of stabilization where efforts focus on creating a security sector that provides public safety and national security with respect for democratic process, rule of law and human rights. Because security is always a sensitive issue of national sovereignty, national authorities are the only actors who can competently lead and implement an SSR process. SSR can happen in any context at the initiative of national authorities who wish to improve how the security sector works with respect to rule of law, democratic processes, and human rights, but in stabilization contexts there is often significant support for these efforts from outside sources. When international actors and national actors share the same priorities for reform, SSR can create powerful change in a relatively short time. When the vision of interests of international and national reform actors do not coincide, the result is more often slow decisions and reform programs that target technical aspects of reform, but do little to enhance respect for rule of law, democratic process or human rights. Public attitudes towards the security sector are both an essential ingredient in formulating viable SSR policies, as well as a factor in their success. Security sector reporting that can explain the stakes of various policy choices and extensive coverage of the progress and outcomes of these efforts are essential in building public expectations for higher standards of security provisions and accountability.

Why stabilization and Security Sector Reform matter for security sector reporting?

Reporting on SSR is the key means by which the public is informed of plans to reform the security sector and kept abreast of progress and results. Ensuring the public is well informed on these matters is important because the public has a right to know how resources are being used to provide an essential public service that is supposed to work in their best interests. At the same time, what the public knows or does not know about SSR is also a factor in whether or not reforms succeed. For example, in a context where petty bribery has always been a common practice among security officials, training security officials not to ask for bribes and creating institutions that prevent them from doing so, will not succeed if members of the public continue to expect to be able to gain special treatment. Similarly, ensuring that police do not beat suspects or hold them for undetermined amounts of time without charge are markers of successful police reform in favor of human rights, but they will not be popular changes in places where the public expects police to beat people who are widely believed to be guilty of a crime. **Responsible security sector reporting can and should shape public expectations of SSR processes in stabilization contexts.** At the same time, responsible security sector reporting is also the best means by which security actors, government authorities and international supporters of SSR can be held accountable for progress in reforms or failures to achieve set goals.

Key issues for reporting on stabilization and Security Sector Reform

Improving security provision, management and oversight? SSR is supposed to make security sector actors both more accountable and more effective at their work, but this can only happen if reform programs go beyond the technical aspects of security provision, such as training and new equipment, to address how security providing institutions are managed and whether they are accountable. This means that government authorities responsible for managing security institutions and for overseeing them should be included in reforms. Yet

in many cases, SSR has narrowly focused on the 'hardware' aspects of security providers without looking more broadly at the legal, political and institutional conditions of their management and oversight. The results of these reform efforts are uniformly disappointing and, in some cases, dangerous because unaccountable and poorly managed security forces equipped with better training and equipment can threaten both public safety and national security.

→ **Journalists can ask:**

- ✓ What are the plans for SSR? Are they publicly available? If not, why not?
- ✓ What effects are these initiatives expected to have, including unintended consequences?
- ✓ What efforts will be made to enhance management and oversight capacity?
- ✓ What change can the public expect to see as result of reform plans?
- ✓ How will accountability and transparency of security providers increase? If not, why not?
- ✓ What are the views of parliamentarians, independent oversight authorities and civil society—including experts and scholars—on reform plans?
- ✓ What alternative plans have been considered and why was this course chosen?
- ✓ Has planning been inclusive of difference communities and points of view?
- ✓ Has sufficient critical public discussion of reform plans taken place?
- ✓ What is the history and legacy of the security sector that needs to be addressed?
- ✓ What are the human stories behind reform plans? How have people, communities, and security sector personnel been affected by past failures and what hope do they hold for the future?
- ✓ How has the lack of reform to date affected the daily life and conditions of service in the security sector?

Clear national security policy and priorities? When SSR occurs in stabilization contexts there may be disagreements between stakeholders about the desirable course of reform. Even when all sides agree that increased accountability and effectiveness are the goals and that respect for rule of law, human rights and democratic processes must be the fundamental values, there can still be contentious decisions over priorities, approach and what to act on first. It is important that a clear national vision sets the direction for reform so that changes will be sustained over time and international support is aligned to national priorities. One way to guarantee that national priorities define the reform process is to ensure there is an inclusive and comprehensive national security policy in place, which SSR and international support can align with.

→ **Journalists can ask:**

- ✓ Is there a national security policy in place or planned?
- ✓ Has national security policy been developed through an inclusive process?
- ✓ Are reform priorities clearly defined according to national values and priorities?
- ✓ How are reform choices articulated in policy?
- ✓ Are international and national actors using resources allocated for reform efficiently?
- ✓ What information is being made available to the public about plans and progress?
- ✓ What are viable policy options and their trade-offs?

- ✓ Are there likely conflicts of interest? What measures are in place to disclose or prevent conflicts of interest?
- ✓ How do expert views and analysis from across government authorities and civil society as well as community views contrast with official positions?

Meaningful participation? SSR can only succeed when it is rooted in national security priorities, yet it is not enough for executive authorities, even democratically elected ones, to decide the course of national reform alone. Inclusive decision-making on security needs to ensure that people of diverse genders and identities are consulted in security policymaking. This means looking beyond the institutions and professionals directly involved in security provision and consulting parliamentary representatives, community representatives and working with civil society experts. Across the board, women should be meaningfully represented in policy and decision-making processes at all levels.

→ **Journalists can ask:**

- ✓ How is national security policy is being made?
- ✓ Have decision-making processes about SSR included the views of people of all genders and identities?
- ✓ Are the security needs of all men, women, girls and boys adequately reflected in plans for public safety and national security?
- ✓ Whose interests are at stake in various decisions and whose interests are best served by which policy choices?
- ✓ What views do multiple national communities, international stakeholders and security experts hold about the process?

Box 15 Practical example: “Nigeria: emplacing security sector governance”

In October 2020, following weeks of widespread popular protest against police abuses in Nigeria, a journalist for This Day, a national newspaper based in Lagos, reported on a civil society meeting that brought together “lawyers, lawmakers, activists, law enforcers and media practitioners within the security space to look critically at issues that are currently undermining human security in Nigeria”. The report covers the views of all sides including external supporters of reform, such as national government representatives and international non-governmental organizations which were present. This example demonstrates how security sector reporting focused on questions of SSR can create a space for public discussion of critical choices in public security beyond the confines of a meeting that would otherwise be restricted to interested experts.

Source: Chiemelie Ezeobi, “Nigeria: Emplacing Security Sector Governance”, October 2020, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202010260555.html>

Further resources on stabilization and security sector reform (SSR):

- SSR Backgrounder by DCAF. Available at: <https://www.dcaf.ch/resources?type=publications&id=2719>
- SSSR in a Nutshell, by ISSAT/DCAF. Available at: <https://issat.dcaf.ch/download/2970/25352/ISSAT%20LEVEL%20%20TRAINING%20MANUAL%20-%20SSR%20IN%20A%20NUTSHELL%20-%20205.3.pdf>
- International Security Sector Advisory Team online resource library. Available at: <https://issat.dcaf.ch/Learn>