



## Security Sector Reform: Narrowing the Gap between Theory and Practice

Albrecht Schnabel and Hans Born



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SSR PAPER 1

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DCAF

The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) is an international foundation whose mission is to assist the international community in pursuing good governance and reform of the security sector. The Centre develops and promotes norms and standards, conducts tailored policy research, identifies good practices and recommendations to promote democratic security sector governance, and provides in-country advisory support and practical assistance programmes.

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## **INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

Security sector reform (SSR) has evolved into an increasingly popular approach to address at least some of the challenges experienced in transitional societies. The Arab Spring uprisings in Northern Africa and the Middle East have put the security sector centre-stage of efforts to stabilise the region and build legitimate states and open societies. Those involved in reforming the security sectors in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and other SSR candidates likely to follow across the region should be able to consult and draw on the experiences of almost a decade of attempts to translate the normative concept of SSR into practice. However, while those looking for best practices, lessons and guidance might find themselves inundated by experiences with SSR or SSR-like efforts, they may remain puzzled about the lack of clear-cut and solid success stories and pointers on 'how to do' SSR in the most efficient and effective way. They might also be overwhelmed and discouraged by the demands of comprehensive and holistic SSR. Nevertheless, with nearly ten years of experience in utilising SSR as a critical tool in setting crisis- and conflict-affected fragile societies back on track towards a politically and socially stable, prospering and secure future, numerous lessons can in fact be learned and translated into practical advice.

An emerging body of literature on SSR has been addressing improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of security sector actors and the need to situate their roles within a framework of democratic governance.<sup>2</sup> Much of that experience has shown that almost always SSR takes place against many odds in difficult, barely enabling, less-than-ideal political, security, economic and social contexts. Of course, these are typical

for states that undergo considerable – often dramatic – political and socio-economic transitions from war to (negative) peace, from authoritarianism to democracy and from closed to open societies. Those transitions, difficult as they already are, take place amid environments that are characterised by transitional, often unstable, political institutional arrangements, endemic corruption, ongoing violence, attempts to implement imprecise, open-ended or non-inclusive peace agreements and post-conflict architectures, lack of resources and ‘stolen’ or impending elections or referenda. These are the typical hallmarks of the environments in which comprehensive, holistic and sustainable SSR efforts are pursued. Under the best of circumstances SSR is by no means a popular activity. Under the difficult conditions just described, preparing a society for SSR and implementing it are Herculean tasks that are prone to failure rather than to success. In light of the potential benefits of SSR, however, the slightest gain justifies the most frustrating setback. The gains of SSR for the society, state and wider region are likely considerable. At the same time, the greater the obstacles facing SSR, the greater tends to be the necessity for reforms.

Despite the difficulties of design and implementation, the art of ‘applied SSR’ can be learned. The teachers are those who have experienced and reflected on the failures and successes that have accompanied SSR processes so far. This paper reports on such experiences – how they compare with ideal-type SSR and, most importantly, how they might guide us in charting the tricky waters of real-life SSR efforts and contexts. The goal of full-scale, comprehensive and holistic SSR is an important and helpful backbone against which SSR and SSR-like activities can be measured, and towards which they can aspire while adapting both objectives and implementation to continuously evolving realities on the ground.

To design SSR programmes that are both feasible and effective, two issues are particularly important. First, one should be well aware of what SSR is meant to achieve, even if these objectives – at this very moment – appear to be verging on the impossible. Second, particularly because of the challenges and obstacles that security sector reform activities face, one needs to be keenly tuned in to the opportunities and entry points for SSR that always arise.

For the researcher who is frustrated about the failure to implement SSR norms and the practitioner who is equally frustrated about concepts and strategies that seem too far removed from reality, the gap between

theory and practice in SSR is a source of much irritation and disappointment. This paper compares the normative foundations, core principles and main conceptual pillars of SSR with the difficulties experienced in implementing reforms. In asking how this theory-practice gap can be narrowed, the paper offers a number of suggestions for better practice in implementation. The arguments and findings presented here are based on a series of in-depth case studies, consultations with SSR practitioners and the authors' extensive work on conceptual and practical perspectives of SSR. Thus, following this introduction, the second part of the paper summarises the main components of SSR as a normative concept. It reviews the main definitions, objectives, actors and approaches, and explores what could be considered ideal-case SSR in environments that are particularly conducive to such reforms. Of course, the real-life conditions of implementing SSR activities tend to be very different. The third part of the paper, which refers in particular to SSR experiences in the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Morocco, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste, shows that an ideal environment rarely exists in reality. After theory and practice of SSR have been sketched out, the fourth part of the paper offers a series of recommendations that might prove useful to those involved in designing and implementing country-specific SSR programmes and activities. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research on how the SSR concept has been and can be better implemented in practice, facilitating realistic and systematic SSR reviews, planning, implementation and assessment. While the focus of this paper is on externally assisted SSR, many of its lessons are also very relevant to SSR activities that are locally initiated and driven, without significant participation by external actors.



## **SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN THEORY**

The normative concept of security sector reform is based on the assumption that societies are better off with a security sector that is an asset, not an obstacle, to peace, security, development and stability. SSR, if approached seriously, involves a broad range of activities in reference to a similarly broad range of actors. The sheer volume of activities associated with comprehensive and holistic SSR sometimes creates the impression that, if followed to the letter, it is an unrealistic and overly complex project that lacks firm grounding in the realities of many, if not all, transitional societies. On the other hand, as the following pages show, the full SSR agenda makes sense in its own right, as it circumscribes specific steps towards the creation of a security sector that is efficient, effective and accountable and operates according to good governance principles.

Some countries' security sectors may already comply with many or most of those principles, while others would need to undergo certain adjustments (i.e. reforms) in order to do so. The fact that rudimentary national security sectors are in need of substantial reform efforts in often highly unwelcoming environments, seemingly bordering the impossible in terms of financial, human and political goodwill and resources required, does not question the validity of ideal-case SSR, however. One could argue that full-scale SSR is a realistic option for any transitional or post-conflict situation, but the latter are generally not ready for immediate, full-scale application of SSR. Thus SSR will inevitably be a much longer-lasting and

more demanding project in situations that are far removed from ideal-case SSR environments than in those that are more welcoming.

This part of the paper reviews the full range of SSR activities, which always resemble a highly political process. It outlines the principles of good governance of the security sector which are pursued by SSR activities, and highlights key characteristics of an ideal environment for the implementation of SSR. This sets the stage for a critical exploration of the challenges experienced in SSR contexts that do not meet these ideal requirements – typically the contexts in which SSR is being pursued by international, national and local actors.

### **From a normative concept to principled policy guidance**

Conceptual, technical and political debates on SSR tend to suffer from a sometimes confusing array of definitions as to the institutions and actors that make up a security sector and the specific tasks and activities that characterise the process of reforming it. In order to introduce a sense of coherence to these debates, a number of efforts have been made to develop universally applicable definitions that could guide SSR activities wherever they are envisioned and performed. The latest attempt at coining a widely accepted definition of the nature of SSR is provided by the 2008 report of the UN Secretary-General, 'Securing Peace and Development: The Role of the United Nations in Supporting Security Sector Reform'.<sup>3</sup> The report offers a solid framework for a comprehensive and coherent approach by the United Nations and its member states towards SSR, reflecting shared principles, objectives and the basis for common guidelines for the design and implementation of SSR. The report emphasises that 'Security sector reform describes a process of assessment, review and implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation led by national authorities that has as its goal the enhancement of effective and accountable security for the State and its peoples without discrimination and with full respect for human rights and the rule of law.'<sup>4</sup> SSR as a concept differs substantially from previous debates and practices that focused on civil-military relations and civilian control of the armed (i.e. military) forces. In what points to a significant evolution of these earlier debates and practices:

the importance of security sector reform is that it demonstrates that security goes beyond traditional military elements and involves a much wider range of national and international institutions and actors. It also highlights the need for security arrangements that take into account the linkages between the different actors. Equally, security sector reform underscores that effectiveness, accountability and democratic governance are mutually reinforcing elements of security.<sup>5</sup>

As is typical for UN reports of this nature, the definitions presented result from extensive and broad consultation processes that are expected to generate broadly and widely supported UN norms and guidelines for the UN's member states.

The UN definition was preceded – and in many ways informed – by the OECD Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) work towards developing what amounts to a slightly more comprehensive and demanding definition of SSR in terms of its coverage of actors, processes and principles. The *OECD/DAC Handbook on Security System Reform*, a much-referred-to standard elaboration on the concept of SSR, calls for a holistic approach to reforming the roles and tasks of all state and non-state institutions and actors that contribute to the provision of security for the state and its people. According to the OECD/DAC, the following actors and institutions make up a country's security sector – and may thus be subject to reform efforts:

- *Core security actors*, including the armed forces; police service; gendarmeries; paramilitary forces; presidential guards; intelligence and security services (both military and civilian); coastguards; border guards; customs authorities; and reserve and local security units (civil defence forces, national guards and militias)
- *Management and oversight bodies*, including the executive, national security advisory bodies, legislative and select committees; ministries of defence, internal affairs and foreign affairs; customary and traditional authorities; financial management bodies (finance ministries, budget officers and financial audit and planning units); and civil society organisations (civilian review boards and public complaints commissions)<sup>6</sup>
- *Justice and the rule of law*, including the judiciary and justice ministries; prisons; criminal investigation and prosecution services;

human rights commissions; ombudspersons; and customary and traditional justice systems

- *Non-statutory security forces*, including liberation armies; guerrilla armies; private security and military companies; and political party militias<sup>7</sup>

The *main objectives* of security sector reform are twofold. First, reforms are designed to develop an effective, affordable and efficient security sector, for example by restructuring or building human and material capacity. Second, reforms facilitate democratic and civilian control of the security sector, for example through strengthening the management and oversight capacities of government ministries, parliament and civil society organisations.

In operational terms SSR covers a wide range of activities within five broad categories:<sup>8</sup>

- *Overarching activities*, such as security sector reviews and their development, needs assessments and development of SSR strategies and national security policies
- *Activities related to security- and justice-providing institutions*, such as restructuring and reforming national defence, police and other law enforcement agencies as well as judicial and prison systems
- *Activities related to civilian management and democratic oversight* of security and justice institutions, including executive management and control, parliamentary oversight, judicial review, oversight by independent bodies and civil society oversight
- *Activities related to SSR in post-conflict environments*, such as DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration), control of small arms and light weapons, mine action and transitional justice
- *Activities related to cross-cutting concerns*, such as gender issues and child protection

Especially in post-conflict contexts, SSR makes important political, economic, social and institutional contributions to wider peacebuilding tasks. The political contribution involves the promotion and facilitation of

civil control over security institutions; the economic contribution is made through more appropriate consumption and allocation of the society's resources for the security sector; the social contribution assures that the population's physical security is guaranteed – and not additionally threatened – by the security sector; and, directly related, institutional improvements are made through increased professionalisation of all actors in the security sector.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to these technical objectives of SSR, the academic and practitioner literature, official statements and operational and institutional guidance documents such as the OECD/DAC guidelines, the UN Secretary-General's report and related documents<sup>10</sup> emphasise that SSR should embrace the following principles:

- SSR should be people-centred, locally owned and based on democratic norms, human rights principles and the rule of law – and thus provide freedom from fear and measurable reductions in armed violence and crime. These principles should not simply remain at the level of proclamation and intention, but must be upheld when designing, implementing and assessing SSR programmes.<sup>11</sup>
- SSR should be viewed as a framework to structure responses to diverse security challenges facing states and their populations through integrated development and security policies and greater civilian involvement and oversight.<sup>12</sup> Particularly the achievement of gender equality and an end to gender-based violence should be given serious attention. Broad-based public consultation processes as well as the design of a national security strategy are important steps in developing feasible SSR strategies.
- SSR activities should form part of multisectoral peacebuilding approaches, based on thorough assessments of the security and justice needs of the people and the state. This ensures that SSR responds to the needs of all stakeholders.
- SSR should be developed in adherence to good governance principles, such as transparency, accountability and others, which will be further discussed below.
- SSR should be implemented through transparent and efficient processes and policies that enhance institutional and human

capacities in order to ensure that security is provided effectively and justice is delivered equitably.<sup>13</sup>

Every society has a security sector of some sort – when there are prisons and armed forces or police, either as formal institutions of the state or in the service of traditional authorities, there is a security sector. Yet why are some security sectors in need of reform? Put simply, if a national security sector is not inclusive, is partial and corrupt, unresponsive, incoherent, ineffective and inefficient and/or unaccountable to the public, the sector (or any of its institutions) is in need of reform. The term ‘reform’ describes an institutional and behavioural transformation that leads to improved performance in all of the above-mentioned characteristics to create a legitimate, credible, well-functioning and well-governed security sector which serves society in providing internal and external, direct and structural security and justice as a society-owned public service. The extent to which reforms are required depends on how closely the security sector already meets these characteristics.

Improving inadequate structures and processes of security provision and security sector governance rarely requires a total overhaul. Certain components and aspects of a nation’s security sector might be functioning quite well, while others might be in need of extensive improvements. Thus identifying where, how and when individual components of the security sector must be (re)built, restructured, adjusted and/or fine-tuned is an important task and involves a thorough assessment of the sector’s roles, tasks and requirements in light of a society’s specific security and development needs. Security sector reform programmes and processes therefore necessarily vary from situation to situation, with each SSR context being different and unique. Yet the objectives are always the same – the creation and consolidation of an effective, efficient, accountable security sector that complies with good governance standards.

### **SSR’s main goal: Assuring good governance of the security sector**

An adequately reformed security sector ensures sustainable, *good* governance of the sector which draws on the key principles of the ‘good governance’ concept, including participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, effectiveness and efficiency, and

accountability.<sup>14</sup> Compliance with these principles is best achieved if SSR is accompanied by a parallel democratisation process. In the absence of a democratic political system (and civic culture), some or all of these good governance principles are difficult if not impossible to achieve. The following briefly describes how these principles affect the governance and functioning of the security sector.<sup>15</sup>

*Participation* by both men and women is a cornerstone of good governance. Participation can be assured either through direct involvement or representation by legitimate intermediate institutions or individuals. Effective participation needs to be organised and participants need to be adequately informed, which in turn requires unhindered freedom of association and expression, as well as an organised and informed community of civil society organisations. For the security sector this means that security institutions are attentive to and representative of the entire population. All groups, particularly the most vulnerable and traditionally marginalised, need to be offered sufficient opportunities to safeguard their well-being through direct or indirect participation in providing and managing the security sector.

The *rule of law* is a principle of governance that requires all persons, institutions and entities, including the state, to be accountable to laws that are publicly proclaimed, equally enforced and independently adjudicated. These laws are expected to be consistent with international human rights norms and standards. Good governance requires not only fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially, but also full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities and vulnerable groups. In the context of the security sector the impartial enforcement of laws necessitates an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force. Both judicial institutions and law enforcement bodies must be able and willing to ensure the proper interpretation and upholding of the law.

Commitment to *transparency* requires that information is freely available, directly accessible and provided in easily understandable forms and media. Accordingly, security institutions are expected to operate in an open and accessible manner and civil authorities need to have access to and be periodically informed about their work.<sup>16</sup>

Good governance requires that institutions are *responsive* and serve all stakeholders, everywhere, within a reasonable time frame. As in the case of any other public service, the security sector is expected to deliver

security and justice professionally, without unnecessary delay and wherever its services are required – be that, for instance, in urban centres or in remote rural areas.

Good governance requires continuous mediation of the vast diversity of interests that characterise each society. It is important to reach a broad *consensus* on the best interests of the entire community and the ways and means chosen to ensure that these interests are best served. In terms of the security sector this means that security objectives and policies need to be coherent and informed by a thorough sector review that is in line with a national security strategy and vision, all informed by thorough and inclusive stakeholder consultation processes.<sup>17</sup>

Commitment to good governance requires institutions to produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best possible use of the resources that are available. Thus the security sector needs to be *effective and efficient*. Security institutions must be capable of delivering security professionally, at a reasonable cost and in a manner that helps ensure that all reasonable security needs of all stakeholders are served. It also means that the executive and civil authorities in charge of security institutions are capable of providing effective direction and management. Security institutions must be capable of cooperating smoothly with one another while being well integrated into regional and international security frameworks.

*Accountability* is a key requirement of good governance. In general, an organisation or an institution is accountable for its performance to those who define its mandate and those who are affected by its decisions or actions. Not only governmental bodies but also the private sector and civil society organisations are accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. Accountability cannot be assured without transparency and the rule of law. In the context of the security sector, security institutions need to be overseen by, and accountable to, civilian and democratically constituted authorities. There must be provisions and opportunities for an autonomous civil society: active and independent civil society organisations need to be afforded a decisive role in monitoring the performance of security organisations, and in informing and educating the public about the mandates and performance of all actors within the security sector.

Good governance of the security sector is based on the conviction that, as former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted in 1999, the sector



‘should be subject to the same standards of efficiency, equity and accountability as any other [public] service’.<sup>18</sup> It is this spirit of a ‘culture of service’ that is recognised in the current Secretary-General’s report on SSR as ‘promoting unity, integrity, discipline, impartiality and respect for human rights among security actors and shaping the manner in which they carry out their duties’.<sup>19</sup> Only then can societies be assured that ‘the security institutions perform their statutory functions – to deliver security and justice to the state and its people – efficiently and effectively in an environment consistent with democratic norms and the principles of good governance and the rule of law, thereby promoting human security’.<sup>20</sup>

If taken seriously and targeted towards eventually meeting good security governance principles, SSR is a highly demanding set of activities. It involves potentially deep and extensive institutional, social and behavioural changes to the value systems of individuals and institutions, which tend to be entrenched in history, tradition and continuity. Coping with radical change is not necessarily a trademark of security institutions, which consider themselves as bulwarks of stability. Just as reform needs vary greatly from case to case, so do the circumstances which prescribe the political, social, economic or security environment in which SSR takes place.

### **Ideal conditions for security sector reform**

Pursuing SSR to create a solid foundation for good security sector governance is a complex, demanding and challenging undertaking. Even once achieved, good governance requires careful maintenance and continuous adjustment to evolving internal and external security conditions and requirements. Reforms are part and parcel of a dynamic and evolving society – and security sector reforms are inextricably linked to evolving security requirements in such dynamic contexts.

Reform processes are about responding to change as well as managing change. The requirements for dealing with change and the capacity to develop adequate responses can differ greatly from context to context. Some situations are more and some less supportive of reform processes. In order to make proper preparations for inevitable setbacks in implementing reforms, it is helpful to envision what might be an ideal environment for conducting comprehensive, holistic, timely and effective security sector reforms. There are coping strategies to deal with the

absence of those ideal characteristics, yet one needs to prepare properly. In the likely event that one or more components of an ideal SSR environment are missing, workable measures must be in place to compensate for the absence of these ideal conditions.

Ideal conditions for SSR include a safe environment in which armed violence has been contained and, in the case of post-conflict situations, former conflict parties have disarmed and opted for peaceful means to compete for power and influence. All relevant stakeholders are interested in and committed to the pursuit of serious SSR efforts. The priorities, terms and conditions of such activities have been developed and agreed by all relevant stakeholders, particularly the national and local actors on whose shoulders the eventual success of long-term, sustainable security sector reform and governance will rest. External financial, technical and political commitments are assured and adequate in volume and duration to allow the national and local owners of the SSR process to carry out lengthy yet efficient and sufficient reforms. All security institutions are ready to assume the responsibilities assigned to them as constructive and legitimate security providers. They furthermore appreciate the necessity of – and thus accept and support – civilian and democratic control of their activities. They reach out to other security institutions as well as to oversight and management bodies within the overall security sector in efforts to coordinate effectively their separate but complementary reform efforts. The executive and parliament are both willing and sufficiently capable to exercise their responsibilities in overseeing and managing the country's security institutions. An effective and informed community of civil society organisations joins government agencies and the parliament in governing the security sector and monitoring ongoing reform processes.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, a number of ideal framing conditions facilitate efforts to implement and sustain comprehensive and holistic SSR efforts. These include the need for common reform visions by all actors involved; local, national and international capacities to sustain reforms once initiated; the assurance of all actors' sustainable commitment to lengthy and at times struggling reform processes; and strong political leadership and support.

*Common vision of reform priorities*

A common vision of reform priorities, shared by all relevant local, national and international stakeholders, is the bedrock of a welcoming and favourable SSR environment. Such a vision is underpinned by a common or shared understanding of the constitutional prerogatives that guide and control the individual and sometimes diverging aspirations of the various players within the security sector. There is respect for a constitutional process that carries and guards this vision, as well as for the need to develop reform efforts in response to careful analyses of existing and future security threats and, thus, requirements for security provision. Both the common vision and relevant background analyses are ideally based on locally and nationally owned and driven fact-finding and assessment processes.

It is also important that the protagonists of impending reforms enjoy sufficient authority over – and are able to call on the cooperation of – those institutions that are most directly affected by the implementation of SSR policies and programmes. It is likely that chances for such cooperation increase if reform objectives complement a country's overall national political and security visions. For instance, SSR needs to be seen as a process that helps strengthen the country's geopolitical position. This can be achieved by capitalising on reform achievements through improved prospects for enhanced access to regional alliances or by promoting a country's external reputation as a reliable, politically coherent and predictable regional and global player.

Demands for reform should originate from – and agreement on reform priorities should be supported by – all sectors of society. In that way SSR can generate ownership across all of society, not only among the government and its international partners. In the long run, sustainability of reform efforts and stability and predictability of security sector governance mechanisms depend on solid and broad support within society, during times of success and particularly during times of failure.

As long as a broadly shared vision for reform priorities exists, partnerships within the government and between local, national and international actors can be established and will drive the reform process. Few, if any, SSR projects can be undertaken by a single actor without the support, or possibly even against the will, of other actors in society and the

security sector. Shared visions translate into shared responsibility and joint action. Yet shared responsibility must also include the willingness to share the risks – and consequences – of failure.

### *Local, national and international capacities*

Agreement on shared visions and reform objectives, along with the commitment to carry out necessary reforms, is an important ingredient of successful SSR. However, a positive attitude, good intentions and political commitment are not enough to assure the successful implementation of reforms. Also important are the requisite capacities to carry out reforms and sufficient opportunities for change. These include the presence of an environment that is conducive to reform, characterised by an absence – or at least low levels – of violence; the availability of basic infrastructure and a working and favourable legal framework; the presence of solid, stable and well-organised domestic security and political institutions; low levels of corruption; and an active and informed civil society. Focusing on local ownership, for instance, only makes sense if local stakeholders and ‘movers’ of reform are adequately prepared to initiate, lead and maintain the reform effort. Particularly in post-conflict situations, a largely unblemished wartime record of security institutions and/or a successful vetting and DDR record further strengthen the security institutions’ capacities to maintain reform efforts.

The contributions by international actors benefit from political astuteness, patience, flexibility and a willingness to listen to and learn from local counterparts; appropriate and suitably funded mandates; the willingness to act upon a common sense of purpose shared among diverse external players; and the ability to gather and willingness to share information and intelligence. These capacities can be most effectively developed if potential armed spoilers are effectively managed and willing to pursue their interests non-violently; if humanitarian and development assistance help the population meet their basic needs; and if democratisation processes are well on their way.

### *Stakeholder commitment*

Ideally, all stakeholders view and support SSR programmes as inherent components of broader national political and social reforms, or as part of a

broader peacebuilding process in post-war settings. The potential security and development gains offered by SSR activities need to be apparent and effectively communicated.<sup>22</sup> In addition, SSR works better when neighbouring states are supportive of reform efforts, abstaining from fuelling armed conflicts and refraining from interfering in the choices the society itself needs to make. The internal political environment needs to be conducive to political and social change, building on functioning institutions that permit a consensus-oriented dialogue among political factions and parties. Cooperation between international and national actors is based on real partnerships when national and local structures for the coordination of donor assistance are in place and donors are in a 'listening mode' to attune their work to national and local needs and expectations.

In post-conflict situations, peace agreements are useful entry points and unique windows of opportunity for SSR programmes, particularly if negotiations have produced a general consensus among the major former conflict parties on SSR needs, requirements and activities.<sup>23</sup> However, success lies in the eventual implementation of SSR programmes and is possible only if all stakeholders are prepared to stay the course and resist unavoidable phases of SSR fatigue caused by frustrating and disappointing, yet inevitable, setbacks.

### *Strong and committed political leadership*

Particularly the political will necessary to make significant reforms receives a positive boost if the chief executive is personally and unequivocally committed to the spirit, substance and implementation of reform programmes, regardless of whether that happens to be the result of personal or political conversion and conviction or due to self-interested political calculation. In many SSR environments the chief executive is a critical player and symbolic figure, often with immense discretionary and symbolic powers. Expressing undisputed political will and personal commitment to carry through SSR sends a clear and consistent message to all involved stakeholders that in the actual implementation of initial SSR commitments success will likely be rewarded and failure will be sanctioned.

*The feasibility of an ideal environment*

It is of course hard to imagine that many of the conditions for an ideal SSR environment, as sketched out above, exist in those countries that are in need of security sector reforms. The security environment conditions the parameters of the political and operational environments for which an SSR strategy and a policy for implementation are designed. A particular strategy or approach, once chosen, will have to be continuously reviewed and adjusted or even abandoned if the context – and the political, social or economic parameters on which it was based – changes. Nevertheless, short- to medium-term impasses for reform programmes should not compromise the pursuit of long-term objectives. They should also not lead to short-term thinking and the design of quick-fix approaches that abandon SSR's long-term goals. For instance, the absence of good governance – or in some cases the lack of any semblance of governance – tends to strengthen support for short-term pragmatic approaches, such as 'lighter', less comprehensive, increasingly non-committal and thus less sensitive approaches to SSR. Believing that these less controversial approaches might eventually and automatically trigger commitment to good governance and more comprehensive SSR approaches may in some cases be a fatal mistake, and might result in an eventual abandonment of commitments to sustainable SSR and good security sector governance.

Attempts to live up to a full and comprehensive range of SSR objectives with the support of all relevant actors within the wider SSR community, including the national security sector and the international donor community, will rarely be a smooth undertaking. On the contrary, based on its very necessity, SSR tends to take place in highly volatile and unpredictable political environments, far removed from the ideal conditions required for smooth implementation. The next section focuses on experiences with the actual implementation of SSR programmes in less than ideal environments, drawing on case studies of particular country contexts and SSR programmes, and on the insights of experienced SSR analysts and practitioners.<sup>24</sup> SSR in practice tends to take place in very difficult settings and eventual success will require a high degree of flexibility and adaptability by all actors involved.

## **SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN PRACTICE**

The following reflections on more likely, realistic SSR environments are based on experiences with SSR activities in the Central African Republic (CAR), Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Georgia, Morocco, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste.<sup>25</sup> These empirical lessons are supplemented with lessons and experiences shared by a number of SSR practitioners as well as the authors' own experiences.<sup>26</sup> Together these experiences, lessons and good and bad practices cover several cross-cutting themes: insights on SSR activities and processes in practice; challenges and obstacles to SSR; opportunities and entry points to carry out SSR; and recommendations for improving SSR implementation, particularly if operating in challenging contexts.

### **Partial and quasi-SSR in practice – The fallacy of SSR 'light'**

Particularly in the context of post-conflict and transition states, SSR initiatives tend to be narrowly focused on specific components of the security sector, notably the military. Moreover, the focus tends to be much more limited than that desired by broader ideal-type objectives. In the reality of post-conflict and transition states, the focus of SSR is predominantly on making the security sector more effective, but not necessarily more accountable. On a more technical level, implementation tends to suffer again and again from great difficulties in sensibly sequencing SSR activities.

*The partial nature of SSR activities*

Many SSR efforts of national authorities and the international community do not even attempt to take a comprehensive approach to reform the security sector. Instead, the predominant focus is on traditional military elements of security. What is called an SSR activity in Colombia, the DRC, Nepal and Sri Lanka mainly (but not exclusively) focuses on the military. There might be valid reasons why one would prioritise the military. All these countries have been or currently are involved in a civil war in which the military has been the dominant actor in armed struggles against rebel groups. In Colombia and Sri Lanka, reform efforts focused on force modernisation, training and upgrading equipment in order to help the armed forces prevail in civil wars. In the DRC and Nepal, where peace agreements had signalled the end of protracted civil wars, reforms of the military focused on the (re)integration of rebels into the state's armed forces.

On the other hand, in Timor-Leste, for example, the military was not the primary focus of SSR. Here the police received the bulk of support from the international community, which points to a strong emphasis on domestic aspects of security. In the CAR, Georgia and Morocco a more comprehensive approach was followed, covering nearly all security-providing institutions. However, these efforts were neither entirely comprehensive nor carried to a successful conclusion. Although national stakeholders in the CAR managed to agree on a roadmap for the reform of the security sector, the implementation of reforms was stalled by internal resistance from powerful elites.<sup>27</sup> In Georgia, justice reform seriously lagged behind and most reform activities were 'sketchy', carried out in a hurried manner and neither understood nor accepted by the institutions of the security sector.<sup>28</sup> Morocco is a particularly interesting case. Without even using the term 'SSR', various reforms were implemented from a 'whole-of-government' perspective, with the objective of making the entire government bureaucracy – including the security sector – more efficient and responsive to the needs of the people.<sup>29</sup>

SSR activities can also be considered as partial if they ignore or bypass the basic security needs of the people, as illustrated in the context of gender discrimination and sexual and gender-based violence. The UN approach to SSR calls for gender-sensitive programmes throughout the



planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases of SSR. This includes support for the creation of non-discriminatory security sector institutions that are representative of the population as a whole and effectively respond to the specific security needs of a wide diversity of groups. Those needs, for instance, include preventing and addressing sexual and gender-based violence. In reality, SSR practices are often outright 'gender blind'. This was the case in the DRC, where members of the security services who had committed gender crimes were not punished, the fact that women have been the primary victims of the security forces is not recognised and women are greatly under-represented in the security sector.<sup>30</sup> While gender issues were not initially included on the SSR agenda, this has subsequently changed as a result of increased international attention to the high rates of sexual violence against women in the DRC: the United Nations appointed a special adviser on sexual violence, the European Union Advisory Mission in the Congo (EUSEC) employed a gender specialist and a focal point for gender violence was appointed in the DRC Ministry of Defence. However, the effect of these measures has been minimal, with little if any impact on preventing gender-based violence.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in the case of the CAR, civil society organisations complained about continued impunity of perpetrators of human rights abuses and continued neglect of victims of past violations.<sup>32</sup> While focusing more effectively on preventing and addressing sexual and gender-based violence is an important first step towards addressing 'gender blindness' in SSR, this is still far from pursuing a comprehensive approach towards integrating gender issues, as outlined in the UN Secretary-General's report on SSR.

All too often (and in all cases referred to above), applied SSR is a partial exercise at best, as reforms are characterised by a strong, if not exclusive, focus on one or two components of the security sector, usually the military. As well, gender mainstreaming, a characteristic of progressive SSR, tends to be neglected.

Furthermore, intelligence services, one of the key elements of the security sector, often receive barely any attention, as intelligence reform is treated as an either marginal or altogether non-existent issue within the broader context of countries' SSR programmes. Two reasons might help explain the marginalisation of intelligence reform. First, intelligence services are often considered to be a personal instrument of the president. They are used to maintain the regime, to ensure the personal security of the

president and to 'punish' his or her political opponents. In this context, intelligence officials frequently have great difficulty in distinguishing threats to national security from the activities of political opponents, particularly when both are, in their view, synonymous concepts.<sup>33</sup> As reformed intelligence services function on the basis of the rule of law and are therefore subject to various accountability and transparency control mechanisms, reforming them involves the risk that the president would eventually be deprived of the privilege to use intelligence as his or her personal instrument and, quite often, an important power base. This might help explain, although not necessarily justify, domestic resistance against reforming intelligence services in post-conflict and transition states.

A second reason concerns the international community. Intelligence services are a very sensitive and secretive area of government activity. Often donor states' involvement in intelligence assistance focuses on creating operational capacity. This tends to be done outside donor aid programmes or multilateral SSR efforts, instead taking place on the basis of bilateral or multilateral cooperation between intelligence services in donor and recipient nations. The sensitivity surrounding intelligence work may furthermore explain why the UN Secretary-General's report on SSR explicitly mentions that the organisation is normally not involved in the reform of intelligence services.<sup>34</sup>

### *The limited nature of SSR*

In addition to partial or incomplete reforms of security institutions, many so-called SSR programmes fail to prioritise and strengthen democratic institutions and legal frameworks for providing accountability and oversight of the security sector. Thus the reform of the sector is predominantly geared towards modernising security institutions, instead of making them more accountable. In the case of Colombia, for instance, an exclusive focus on the modernisation of the security sector institutions did not include substantial consultations with civil society and parliament and was not aimed at making the armed forces more accountable and responsive to them.<sup>35</sup> The experience in the DRC shows that most military missions do not include a political adviser who deals with oversight matters, while military advisers often struggle with addressing political issues such as civilian oversight and control.<sup>36</sup> At the same time civilian personnel of international

missions are reluctant to deal with the national and local military because of restrictive rules on the use of SSR funds for development assistance.<sup>37</sup> The experience in the DRC also reveals that strengthening oversight is not simply a matter of putting laws, institutions and rules of procedure in place. While the DRC has oversight mechanisms in place, they are not being fully used.<sup>38</sup> Morocco is again an interesting case. Reforms were carried out without public accountability and parliamentary control, as the central position of the king in the political system of Morocco does not allow for greater public involvement.<sup>39</sup> Management, control, financing, operations and appointments of the security sector lie entirely within the power of the king, and initiatives to reform the sector are carried out according to his instructions.<sup>40</sup> In Timor-Leste the security institutions were built up from scratch after the country became independent in 1999. However, in the first phase of SSR between 1999 and 2006, hardly any attention was given to developing a legal framework for the security sector or subjecting the sector to executive and legislative oversight. This lack of institutionalisation was one of the main factors behind the political crisis of 2006.<sup>41</sup>

### *Awkward SSR processes*

While the previous two points addressed whether or not approaches to SSR have been comprehensive in terms of the range of security providers involved and the inclusion of governance structures, the process of reform faces similar problems. Ideally, an SSR process ranges from initial review to the design of reform measures, their implementation, monitoring and, eventually, evaluation.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, in practice security sector reviews (which, among other things, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the security sector in a given country) are often not conducted and SSR activities are sequenced at random rather than by design.

Among the cases examined for this discussion, a security sector review only figured in SSR processes in the DRC, Sri Lanka, the CAR and Timor-Leste. In addition, where a review was conducted, it was either partial (focusing only on the military in the DRC and Sri Lanka), proposed but not performed (Timor-Leste) or did take place but its recommendations were not implemented (the CAR). In the DRC, EUSEC undertook an operational audit of the armed forces, on the basis of which it identified the main weaknesses as poor working and living conditions in the barracks,

corruption and a lack of centralised information. The findings resulted in a number of proposals to address these weaknesses.<sup>43</sup> Such operational audits are critical for efforts to professionalise or modernise the armed forces. However, they do not qualify as security sector reviews when, as in this case, only the military is involved and no attention is paid to oversight and accountability issues.

A similar review was conducted in Sri Lanka, addressing operational aspects and the institutional framework of the armed forces. Following the 2002 cease-fire agreement, the Sri Lankan prime minister decided to initiate that review. A retired chief of army staff was appointed to head the Defence Review Committee, which was created exclusively for this purpose. The committee was mandated to review the organisation, legal framework and future roles and missions of the armed forces. However, due to domestic political struggles between the president and the prime minister, the work of the committee was aborted before it could complete its task.<sup>44</sup>

In the CAR a representative and potentially very influential review was conducted, but was not sufficiently followed up. Two nationwide events – a seminar and a roundtable – were organised to examine SSR and develop a roadmap for future reform. As part of these national meetings specific committees were formed to examine various areas of the security sector. These committees were organised in an inclusive way and involved all major stakeholders, including civil society representatives. The committees conducted hearings and received testimonies of high-ranking military and civilian officials. The review resulted in a roadmap, featuring a list of actions and a timetable for future reforms of the security sector. However, many elements of the roadmap were not implemented after they faced opposition from either the political or the security leadership.<sup>45</sup>

After the 2006 crisis in Timor-Leste, during which large parts of the security institutions collapsed and the country was on the brink of civil war, the United Nations recommended conducting a comprehensive SSR review of the future roles and needs of the security sector; the aim was to inform preparations for institutional capacity building. However, after the United Nations proposed the review in agreement with the government in 2006, presidential and parliamentary elections held in 2007 produced a new government, which considered the commitment to undertake an SSR review to be a leftover from the previous government. It showed little interest in undertaking the review, which was subsequently abandoned.<sup>46</sup>

The three examples of Sri Lanka, the CAR and Timor-Leste are illustrations of how political parameters have shaped or even stalled SSR efforts. Political disagreements, changes of governments or the fear that SSR erodes one's power base have shaped or even (partly) blocked SSR.

Even once reforms do take place, they are often poorly coordinated. At times the reform of some security sector institutions lags behind that of others. For example, judicial reform in Georgia has moved more slowly than defence and police reform, resulting in an unreformed justice sector (with, for instance, weak capacity and prevailing corruption), which in turn creates bottlenecks that are detrimental to the performance and reforms of other security sector actors. Without a functioning judiciary, for example, law enforcement efforts by the police are bound to fail.<sup>47</sup> In another case, in Colombia criminals could continue their criminal practices in overcrowded and badly managed prisons.<sup>48</sup>

Reforms of security sector oversight institutions often lag behind the reform of security-providing institutions. In several of the countries examined for this study most reform activities were aimed at modernising, training and equipping the institutions that are tasked with providing security (such as in the DRC, Morocco, Colombia and Sri Lanka). This approach seems plausible when, in the aftermath of a crisis or civil war, people, their governments and external actors desire a quick return to security and stability. As a result they prioritise efforts to increase the effectiveness of security-providing institutions. A further and related reason might be that developing legal frameworks and good governance processes and practices can take a long time and is inextricably linked to broader democratisation processes. Moreover, external donors tend to prioritise the development of operational capacity, as they prefer to see security forces in place that are capable of combating organised crime and terrorism – particularly if this might have a positive impact on their own national security. However, this could be a risky strategy. If, in the long run, reforms to improve operational capacities of the security sector are not embedded within a strong institutional and legal framework, individual security institutions might pursue their own causes or be misused by those in power to serve and protect their own interests. In addition, an unaccountable security sector can lead to uncontrolled security spending, to the detriment of other public services. Thus neglecting or delaying the reform of oversight institutions creates the risk that long-term security and stability are

sacrificed for short-term security gains. Based on these experiences with partial, selective and 'light' SSR approaches, those designing, supporting and implementing SSR activities are well advised to – put simply – take SSR more seriously.

Not every activity that can be considered a useful component of an overall SSR strategy does by itself constitute SSR. SSR is a comprehensive undertaking that involves a variety of security institutions, oversight bodies and domestic as well as international stakeholders. Not even all activities that are jointly undertaken with another actor within the security sector necessarily qualify as SSR, particularly if such activities take place in isolation from the other actors or in disregard of key SSR principles, such as the civilian oversight of security institutions. SSR cannot succeed without a truly joint effort. But particularly after a period of turmoil and violence, a country's security institutions do not simply join together on their own initiative. This prompts national and international actors to give up easily on more holistic SSR approaches in favour of sectoral reforms. However, this is not the only logical reaction to difficulties faced in launching full-scale SSR programmes. To bring all relevant stakeholders on board of reform processes, seminars, familiarisation campaigns and high-level discussions with stakeholders on SSR issues need to be initiated, possibly during a peace process, to generate a receptive environment. Such activities, possibly introduced by external actors, can be considered an important SSR component.

In countries or regions where the concept of 'reform', particularly when initiated by outsiders, is strongly resisted, initial dialogues with and among representatives of the executive, legislative and security institutions as well as with civil society organisations are important contributions to building a receptive support base for subsequent reform activities. Thus active lobbying for the utility and necessity of eventual SSR programmes is an important contribution at an early, preparatory stage, particularly in less than welcoming SSR environments. Small steps, such as the support of local researchers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), might be less 'visible' activities than large international conferences or sector-wide reform programmes; but while often undervalued and under-utilised, they might be surprisingly effective in sensitive contexts that do not immediately allow for heavier-handed reform initiatives.

Similarly, building capacities for civilian oversight, particularly by civil society organisations and parliament, is considered a key contribution to SSR. As there is often a thin line between genuine SSR activities and simple security assistance or modernisation, it is important to remain clear about which activity and engagement is or is not intended to strengthen good security sector governance. Unless the governance and accountability dimension is addressed, one simply cannot speak of a legitimate SSR process. Thus fostering capacities for democratic accountability and oversight is an early and critical contribution to genuine SSR efforts.

Despite the need to embrace comprehensive and holistic approaches to SSR, in countries where the military holds a particularly powerful position in society, even an initial narrow focus on defence reform might qualify as SSR, as more transparent governance of the military may in turn create opportunities for better governance of the entire security sector. However, most importantly, elements of SSR or a particular SSR activity qualify as genuine reform as long as they are tied to larger SSR programmes and objectives, and represent at least a small but real step towards realising the two main goals of SSR: good security sector governance and better and relevant security delivery for all of society. Any security sector activity that is intended to change and implement policy, process and procedure, or that builds capacity to increase accountability, transparency, sustainability and alignment with fundamental standards of human rights, qualifies as SSR as long as broader SSR objectives and the governance dimension are not neglected. Thus taking a narrow sectoral focus may be in keeping with SSR principles, but only if broader SSR processes remain the overall objectives.

### **Challenges and obstacles to SSR implementation**

Even if reformers are well intentioned and eager to embrace holistic and cooperative approaches to SSR, particularly in immediate post-war environments, conditions for successful SSR are often far from ideal. SSR practitioners thus face a wide range of obstacles that can stand in the way of debating, planning, agreeing on and implementing SSR programmes. These include any one or more of several factors: corruption; impunity and inadequate steps to 'deal with the past' and work on crimes committed during times of armed conflict; poverty; ongoing military conflict and/or structural violence; prevalence of small arms and light weapons; lack of

donor funds and programme coherence; rigid funding cycles by donors; national agendas and vested interests of donors; donor fatigue; donors' fear of getting pulled into local violence; 'stolen' elections; lack of democratic traditions; a government's lack of political legitimacy and credibility; lack of public confidence in security providers; organised crime; national and regional resource conflicts; activities of armed non-state actors; inadequate, poorly designed and ill-conceived peace agreements; insufficient levels of social capital; insufficiently developed and possibly oppressed civil society; and lack of cultures of accountability and transparency – and other principles of good security governance – among security institutions and oversight mechanisms.<sup>49</sup> Some of these obstacles impede SSR progress, but can be removed. Others cannot be overcome, will continue to obstruct SSR efforts and have to be circumvented.

As the previous section demonstrated, in part due to these obstacles SSR is often conducted in a partial and limited manner. All too often the focus lies on the modernisation of the armed forces, while little attention is paid to other security institutions or strengthening the institutional and legal frameworks that underpin accountability and good governance in the sector. Preparation for SSR is poor, as security sector reviews remain incomplete, are not conducted at all or are not followed up by concrete measures to implement the recommendations produced. In addition to the general obstacles in transitional and post-conflict societies, the eight country case studies used in this paper especially highlight as challenges to the implementation of 'ideal-type' SSR the negative impact of ongoing and past conflicts on reform programmes; the resistance to SSR implementation by powerful domestic elites inside and outside the security sector; the lack of accountability to parliament, courts and civil society; insufficient attention paid to the gender dimension of SSR; and poor donor coordination experienced in many SSR programmes. In addition, SSR projects face a number of institutional, political, ideological, financial and ethical challenges, which will be discussed towards the end of this section.

### *The impact of armed conflict on SSR*

In some contexts armed conflicts are still under way when SSR activities are initiated. For this paper we examined ongoing SSR efforts in three such cases: Colombia (with so far five decades of armed conflict), the DRC (the



eastern part of the country) and Sri Lanka (where the Tamil rebel forces were militarily defeated by government forces in May 2009). While SSR activities had been initiated, these ongoing conflicts have put the security sectors in these countries under great strain, as they have been faced with the dual task of reforming their security institutions and waging war at the same time.

An ongoing conflict has numerous significant consequences for conducting SSR. For one, in intrastate conflicts governments want to regain control over the country's territory and defeat armed challengers through military force. In these contexts most reform efforts are geared towards training and equipping the armed forces, with less attention being paid to reforming other security-providing institutions or increasing accountability and oversight. Not surprisingly, the primary goal of military modernisation programmes taking place in situations of ongoing conflict was to make the armed forces more effective. In several of the cases examined, the armed forces thus grew considerably in size and absorbed a disproportionate amount of public funds. For example, in Sri Lanka the size of the armed forces grew from 95,000 soldiers towards the end of the 1990s to over 200,000 in 2008. This reinforced the military's dominance among other security forces and buttressed its position of power *vis-à-vis* the political leadership.<sup>50</sup> Such a strong power base of the armed forces limits the leverage of political leaders to conduct reforms, which may be painful in the eyes of military commanders if they call for budget cuts, fewer personnel or a more limited mandate. Secondly, another consequence of ongoing armed conflict is the tendency for armed forces to be given greater powers, including law enforcement powers or the power to declare a state of emergency. Moreover, as in the cases of the DRC and Sri Lanka, if ongoing conflict goes hand in hand with a lack of civilian oversight and the use of greater powers, systematic human rights violations might increase.

In post-conflict societies a wide array of peacebuilding, state-building and democratisation processes are undertaken concurrently. SSR does not take place in a vacuum, but is part of these wider processes. It is therefore, along with other reforms, competing for attention and resources from a wide range of national and international stakeholders. The fate of SSR is inextricably tied to the broader democratisation processes, as functional SSR depends on the existence of a functioning parliament, civil society and judiciary. Yet in most of the cases consulted for this study, parliaments,

courts and civil society were either dysfunctional or non-existent during times of conflict or authoritarian rule, while the executive and the security-providing institutions functioned without interruption. This is not an unusual situation: in many post-conflict societies, parliament and civil society are weak and unable to fulfil the roles anticipated in 'ideal-type' SSR. Building up parliamentary oversight and civil society cannot be established or re-established by laws and rules of procedure alone; it takes a long time to reawaken or for the first time foster a tradition and culture of accountability.

### *The political nature of SSR*

SSR is an inherently political process which can be stalled or blocked in at least two ways: on the one hand national elites might perceive and thus abuse the security sector as an instrument to solidify their power, role and position in government; and on the other hand governments in post-conflict situations tend to be very fragile, which weakens their ability to maintain the reform momentum and prevent efforts from within security institutions to block meaningful SSR.

When national elites exploit the security sector to bolster and preserve their positions of power, they are likely to support SSR only if it does not deprive them of their control of the sector. The experiences for instance in the DRC and the CAR show that to prevent losing control over the security sector, government leaders are reluctant to subject it to public accountability and transparency mechanisms, which would imply sharing previously exclusive control with other stakeholders. Instead of democratic accountability and control over the security sector, in such cases political leaders develop alternative control strategies. One such strategy is to build up a strong presidential guard that guarantees the personal security of the president, as is the case in the DRC and the CAR. The presidential guard reports directly to the president, and is better equipped and its members better paid than rank-and-file armed forces personnel. The presidential guard represents an alternative system of checks and balances, based on the use of force.<sup>51</sup> In the case of the CAR an alternative control system was developed: through what could be called 'ethnic manipulation of the security sector', key posts are staffed by individuals from the same ethnic group. Key positions are also given to those armed groups that have helped

the president or other national leaders rise to power.<sup>52</sup> These strategies lead to the personalisation of security and are detrimental to the democratisation of security provision.<sup>53</sup> Ideal-type SSR requires recruitment, selection and promotion on the basis of professional criteria and subject to public accountability, which would of course undermine these alternative control strategies. These practices further explain the difficulties experienced in setting up and maintaining independent and effective oversight and accountability structures.

Secondly, post-conflict states are often plagued by political deadlock and stalemates that slow down, delay or altogether halt SSR activities, as illustrated by the experiences in the DRC, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In the DRC, for instance, post-conflict governments have been unstable as, following a peace deal, they have had to share political control over the security sector with the leaders of former armed rebel groups. Each of these armed factions is struggling to increase its political power and influence, thus preventing meaningful joint discussions on reforming the security sector on the basis of professional criteria, subjection to the rule of law and democratic oversight.<sup>54</sup>

As in the DRC, in Nepal former warring parties formed a new government after a peace agreement was reached in 2006. However, in 2009 the Maoist prime minister lost confidence in the army chief of staff (who was one of his former opponents) and fired him – but he was soon reinstated by the president, who belonged to the opposition party. This triggered a political crisis that blocked all reforms, including those in the security sector.<sup>55</sup> In Sri Lanka the work of the Defence Review Committee was aborted because of a political controversy over whether the prime minister or the president (belonging to different political parties) should be considered the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.<sup>56</sup> Such political wrangling and deadlocks can be detrimental to both planning and implementing SSR.

### *Lack of accountability*

The importance of investing in establishing accountability mechanisms – and the widespread neglect in doing so – has already been mentioned. However, in some cases the parliament, the justice sector and civil society organisations are unable or unwilling to hold security sector actors

accountable. Armed conflict and the lack of a democratic tradition limit parliaments' capacity and role in exercising oversight over the security sector. A combination of a few fateful factors (including lack of authority, all-powerful executives, party politics, a culture that considers security to be the prerogative of the executive and insufficient procedures and structures within parliament) can lead to situations where parliaments are not an equal match for the executive and its security apparatus. For example, the constitutions of francophone African states generally prescribe that parliaments have full law-making powers as well as the power to control the government, including in the areas of defence and security.<sup>57</sup> Experience from the CAR, however, shows that due to long periods of single-party rule and the concentration of power in the hands of the president, 'there is a solid tradition of excessive deference to the executive'.<sup>58</sup> In the DRC, 'parliamentary involvement and control over national security issues have remained minimal'.<sup>59</sup> And while Morocco has a parliament, all powers and initiatives to reform the security sector lie in the hands of the king himself. For example, the king personally appoints all key commanding posts in the security sector and, given the nature of the political system in Morocco, parliament is unlikely to play a strong role in SSR in the near future.<sup>60</sup>

In Sri Lanka the government has been able to undermine effectively the position of the legislature. Emergency regulations have given the government the power to adopt and enforce laws without parliamentary approval. Additionally, the president was able – without any role for parliament – to make unilateral appointments to security institutions, the civil service, the Supreme Court and judicial bodies, thus strengthening the allegiance of these institutions to the president.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, Sri Lankan parliamentarians do not have the necessary knowledge and information to fulfil their constitutional duty to control the security sector. Very few parliamentarians have sufficient expertise to oversee the sector.<sup>62</sup> In Georgia the role of parliament is seriously curtailed because it is dominated by a pro-government movement: when only one member of the Defence and Security Committee belongs to the opposition party, this is bound to limit the extent to which the committee can and will hold the government accountable.<sup>63</sup>

In Colombia a parliamentary defence and security committee does not even exist.<sup>64</sup> Without a specialised committee dealing with national

security, it is very unlikely that a parliament will be able to study, scrutinise and debate government proposals on security and defence issues. The passive role of parliament on security issues reflects a culture of deference to the president and the security institutions themselves. Parliamentarians in Colombia are reluctant to deal with security matters, as it is one of the most sensitive areas of the Colombian state. It is unlikely that this culture will change before the conflict comes to an end.<sup>65</sup>

Civil and military justice systems can play an essential role in countries where soldiers have been involved in grave human rights abuses during a past civil war. Effective justice systems can be important tools to prosecute soldiers who have committed crimes and restore the trust of the people in a security sector that respects the rule of law and human rights. Justice reform is a cornerstone of SSR. However, in many transitional and post-conflict countries, justice systems are unable to play an effective role in security sector governance because of a lack of adequate infrastructure, offices and equipment; poor training; insufficient staff; and, most importantly, corruption and a lack of independence among judges and prosecutors. This makes it almost impossible for the justice sector to prosecute human rights abusers. Reforms of the justice sector are either not given a high priority (as in the case of the DRC<sup>66</sup>) or are lagging behind other reforms (as in the case of Georgia<sup>67</sup>).

Civil society institutions play an important role in holding security institutions, the government and others involved in reforming and governing the security sector accountable to their promises. Yet often they play at best a marginal role. In Sri Lanka, for example, the government curbed the activities of international and national NGOs.<sup>68</sup> International NGO staff are not permitted to remain in the country for more than three years; national NGOs are intimidated and harassed if they criticise the government. Furthermore, the government has installed a special committee that monitors all NGO activity and their finances. NGOs have to pay a special tax, and their funds can be appropriated by the special committee.<sup>69</sup> These measures make it almost impossible for civil society organisations to take an active part in security sector governance. Following Georgia's 'Rose Revolution', civil society became increasingly marginalised as prominent members of civil society organisations began working for the government. At the same time, as critical NGOs were perceived to be linked to political opposition parties, their reports and critiques were considered

to be biased.<sup>70</sup> While the CAR features a robust and vocal community of civil society organisations, their involvement is limited. For instance, civil society leaders were disappointed when their participation in a number of national seminars which discussed reforms of the security sector was reduced to a symbolic role that was merely meant to create an impression of inclusiveness for the benefit of external stakeholders. In reality, civil society was unable to influence the decisions taken by the government.<sup>71</sup>

Weak capacities of oversight mechanisms – particularly in parliament and civil society – hamper efforts to instil local ownership and control over SSR efforts. SSR expertise and capacity, once built up in response to external insistence, might vanish when external start-up assistance winds down. Traditional structures of power and authority tend to resist reform and change while protecting the status quo, as they are concerned about losing power and influence. If they are ready to compromise on their own interests, they need to know what to expect. Transparency about the degree and extent of reforms is important in securing stakeholder support. Yet a common lack of transparency in international missions and other external involvement, along with occasional top-down, élitist approaches *vis-à-vis* national and local actors, contributes to scepticism and diminishing enthusiasm for reform efforts. If security institutions and their leadership resist or obstruct reform efforts and instead prefer to advance a selective or partial understanding of what SSR needs to achieve, reform efforts are hampered from the very start.

In the absence of functioning oversight mechanisms, prevailing cultures of secrecy, a consistent lack of information on SSR-relevant issues and intentional neglect to engage in effective and fair lustration and vetting have in some cases caused the integration of many unsuitable persons in senior positions within security institutions. Often these are also among the most forceful opponents – and internal spoilers – of reform programmes.

Interim governments tend to be weak and unpredictable partners in applied SSR. They lack the power and authority to facilitate the legal and constitutional changes necessary to support reform. They are also reluctant to team up publicly with international actors, as they may run the risk of being judged as subservient to external political and strategic interests. And decisions made and changes achieved by interim governments are more difficult to sustain, as their commitments might last only as long as they stay in power – and that might mean only until the first national election.

*Lack of donor coordination*

Although local ownership of SSR processes is the declared objective of all SSR efforts, particularly in post-conflict settings international donors play crucial roles in initiating and implementing reforms. While donor aid can be crucial in providing opportunities for conducting SSR, poor donor coordination prevents the pursuit of a common approach to SSR. As in many SSR contexts, in the DRC, for example, donor coordination is particularly essential as the DRC's problems are too large, complex and geographically widespread to be addressed by any single donor alone. While most donor countries have officially emphasised the need for harmonising their SSR initiatives, most aid has nevertheless been delivered bilaterally. The problems were compounded by donors' diverging views on both the security sector's role in society and the most essential reform priorities. In the case of the DRC in particular, diverging geopolitical priorities of donor countries from North America, Western Europe, China and elsewhere in Africa showed that weak coordination is not only a matter of insufficient communication but also of diverging strategic interests.<sup>72</sup> In Timor-Leste the lack of a shared understanding of SSR resulted in a sectoral approach by donor states, driven by diverging approaches to SSR and outside potential UN leadership.<sup>73</sup> All too often, donors base their commitments and expectations on an understanding of SSR that differs greatly from the views held by others involved in assisting SSR projects. Such a lack of common understanding, often due to different institutional or personal agendas, paired with a lack of clear direction and purpose make it very difficult to pursue common purposes and objectives in a transparent and effective manner. The so-called 'international community' often does not speak with a common voice. While individual external players promote their own national interests and agendas, the pretence of a joint vision is sometimes nevertheless kept alive, while in truth weak international partnerships and slow and/or inadequate responses of multilateral leaders are debilitating reform efforts. In addition, lack of communication among international actors and between them and their national and local counterparts further hampers effective reform efforts. The lack of a common voice – supporting common approaches and action – among international actors serves as a considerable obstacle to meaningful SSR.

Poor communication among international donors and with national and local counterparts can quickly lead to mismatches between external expectations for a holistic approach to the implementation of SSR programmes, a disjointed and sectoral approach in SSR assistance, and local and national realities and priorities that make it difficult to develop and implement clear, transparent, sensible and sustainable programmes of action. Even if external coordination and unity of purpose are in place and national actors agree in principle on a suggested approach, most post-conflict countries possess weak government institutions and are not prepared to implement long-term programmes unless heavily supported by outside actors. However, unrealistic demands for holistic approaches are not only a concern for developing countries or societies undergoing SSR. Donor countries find it equally difficult to embark on simultaneous and coherent reforms across their security sectors. They also struggle in applying whole-of-government approaches and acting across government ministries with a common voice and approach, and avoiding the notorious stove-piping mentality which is particularly counterproductive and damaging to holistic approaches to applied SSR.

### *Political, ideological and financial challenges*

National governments often face a dilemma: on the one hand they might not be particularly interested in implementing SSR on the terms of the international community (represented by one or more actors actively engaged in the country); while on the other hand they lack the resources to accomplish SSR on their own. As a result, while they might accept external assistance, they only reluctantly – if at all – implement the suggested reforms. Experience shows that unless funding is tied to real and demonstrated political commitments on the part of the recipient, in the long run only modest results can be expected. In cases where national governments have their own resources and can afford to ignore external advice, only partial SSR, sometimes simply preserving the status quo, tends to dominate reform efforts.

If the long-term costs of SSR are not realistically assessed by both international donors and national actors – and are thus not reflected in funding arrangements and national budgets – SSR programmes will not last long enough to achieve their objectives. Even if funds are initially available,



slow progress on the ground may cause donor fatigue. Moreover, a reluctance to infuse quick start-up funds at the beginning of a mission suffocates potentially promising reform efforts in their early development and unnecessarily slows down and frustrates positive momentum that might have been created during peace negotiations or dialogues on post-conflict SSR activities.

### *Ethical challenges*

Reforms tend to be politically contested and psychologically challenging processes. They are about attempts to change what have been judged as inadequate and inappropriate structures and processes in order to meet internally defined or, all too often, externally imposed standards. Apart from the immediate and long-term merits of such reforms, they always challenge previously accepted or enforced rules, standards and principles. Often, reforms reflect the attitude that, rather than being an interactive and collaborative process, some need to be reformed (the objects of reform), while others (the reformers) define the objectives and steer and enforce compliance with the implementation of agreed or enforced measures. At least in early reform stages, the latter tend to consist of external actors with often little knowledge about their host society and its traditions and institutions. It is therefore important that a healthy sense of humility guides those who assist local actors in reforming their security institutions. Poor communication among external actors assisting national reform processes, as discussed above, creates suspicion about the motivations and appropriateness of reform efforts. Those who are being reformed do not want to be left uninformed about developments that shape and reshape their political and professional futures, particularly concerning issues that are at the heart of national sovereignty, pride and interest. Instead, inclusive and interactive approaches should guide reformers in their delicate interactions with local and national actors.

A further ethical challenge concerns the scope and speed of political change envisioned by international donors, which often do not take into account local capacities for change and far exceed reasonable expectations for what are far-reaching political and institutional transformations. Speeding up the process of change, particularly with attempts to emulate political progress made in other parts of the world, can do more harm than

good, particularly if such progress is imposed and not genuinely desired by those who are at the receiving end of reforms. The necessity for and advantage of reform processes must be self-evident and convincing.

Moreover, donors need to practise what they preach. If donors disagree on the substance of reforms and do not themselves practise good security governance, both at home and in missions abroad, convincing others of the benefits of SSR becomes a difficult and dubious venture. Unreasonable expectations and confusing double standards only weaken donors' ability to rally local and national actors round the need to embark on far-reaching reforms.

Finally, when faced with the necessity to engage or cooperate with former insurgents or rebel groups, some of which might be considered as terrorists by the government or its international partners, calls for morality and pragmatism might clash. Unless peace agreements specifically describe and prescribe the future place of former armed groups and their combatants in the security sector and the political, economic and social lives of society, their reintegration and rehabilitation may create not only practical but also moral dilemmas. This may also determine the likelihood that former armed non-state actors will either constructively contribute to or spoil the continuing peace process and SSR efforts.

### *Unintended consequences of SSR*

As is the case with most interventions that are meant to improve and in so doing change existing conditions, SSR processes have not only intended but also unintended consequences. On the one hand, careful planning and reflective implementation can limit the impact of negative unintended consequences. On the other hand, positive developments that may not have been anticipated need to be recognised and built upon.

Unintended negative consequences may include the fact that slow, quiet and – for the general public – not immediately visible implementation processes may generate long-term credibility problems. Also, the reshuffling of domestic power structures as a result of SSR programmes might be perceived as benefiting primarily those who are involved in implementing SSR activities and those with strong links to international actors. As a result, conflict dynamics could be aggravated as a direct result of the political process that underpins SSR.

Unintended yet positive consequences might involve the building and strengthening of trust between previously hostile security sector stakeholders as a result of close collaboration on the design and implementation of sensitive SSR reviews and programmes; and, by engaging in SSR planning and implementation exercises, the opportunity afforded to political, economic and security elites to cooperate on the definition and realisation of a unified vision for a country's foreign and security policy. Such positive dynamics of reform processes have been observed even in the difficult SSR settings examined for this study. Even in the most precarious SSR environments there are opportunities and entry points for SSR activities.

### *Practical difficulties facing SSR practitioners*

Finally, at the end of the day the success of the best reform programme hinges on its implementation – and thus also on the ability of individuals to implement their institutions' presumably carefully designed programmes. This applies equally to internal and external reformers. Challenges such as difficult personal security and working conditions (in terms of weather, equipment or health risks) can hamper performance, especially of external advisers. Their work is made harder by unhelpful donor behaviour, including selfish and short-sighted donor practices that impede coordination; 'donor shopping' by the host, which results in lost time, effort and resources; or confusion among the members of SSR teams about their mandate, objectives and tasks. Their own limited knowledge of local historical, political and social dynamics can also get in the way of making a positive contribution. Another challenge is limited access to relevant local and national information or potentially relevant information gathered but not shared by other international actors. The teams' reputation with local and national counterparts can be damaged by international actors' preference for cooperating with individuals who are known or later turn out to be corrupt or perpetrators of human rights violations; neglect to lobby political elites and SSR stakeholders in light of fierce and often underestimated political opposition to SSR plans; and – sometimes for well-intended practical reasons – resistance to bottom-up peacebuilding and local ownership despite much rhetorical commitment to the contrary.

Numerous unexpected difficulties experienced by practitioners are related to their interactions with local, national and international stakeholders in SSR: these include lengthy and arduous national processes in reaching agreements on the nature of reform requirements; local and national actors' uneasiness in cooperating with international actors during the development of SSR strategies; and attempts by elites in political and security institutions to manipulate the SSR process. Finally, efforts and intentions can be easily compromised when external as well as local actors driving SSR efforts fail to recognise and capitalise on positive conditions, available entry points and other windows of opportunity, such as those described in the next section.

### **Opportunities and entry points for SSR**

Drawing further on experiences in the CAR, Colombia, the DRC, Georgia, Morocco, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste, three factors in particular have proven to facilitate SSR. Among others, these enabling factors include the opportunity offered by peace agreements as entry points for SSR, the availability to draw on the assistance of external actors and the facilitating role played by domestic actors who support SSR processes.

#### *Peace agreements*

In the CAR, the DRC, Nepal and Sri Lanka, peace agreements provided useful entry points for SSR, although for the most part they addressed anticipated reforms of the armed forces and not the wider security sector. In the CAR, while the Libreville Agreement did not mention SSR as such, it provided the basis for a politically inclusive dialogue that involved all major stakeholders, focused on ending the crisis and addressed SSR-related issues.<sup>74</sup> In the DRC, the Global and All-Inclusive Agreement of 2002 included an entire chapter on SSR, along with provisions for the formation of a national army incorporating all the country's major rebel groups, the establishment of a supreme defence council, the protection of leaders during the transition and placing the Congolese security forces under the leadership of an interim defence and security committee. However, none of these provisions reflected a comprehensive approach to SSR, as they were predominantly focused on the role of the armed forces.<sup>75</sup>

In Sri Lanka the signing of the 2002 cease-fire agreement between the government and the Tamil Tigers provided the opportunity and political space for the then prime minister to order a defence review. However, as discussed earlier, the review could not be concluded because of domestic political disagreements between the prime minister and the president (for reasons already noted).<sup>76</sup> Although the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and interim constitution in Nepal did not address SSR in a holistic way, they nevertheless contained important SSR provisions. In particular, the CPA stipulates the 'democratisation of the armed forces', including a number of important steps: enactment of a new military law; establishment of civilian supremacy over the armed forces through the Council of Ministers; preparation of an action plan for the 'democratisation of the armed forces'; and provision of human rights training to members of the armed forces. On the other hand, unfortunately neither the CPA nor the constitution addresses the need for comprehensive SSR, which would include the adoption of a national security policy and reform of the civilian police.

While the peace agreements in these case studies predominantly dealt with the armed forces, they demonstrate that such agreements can nevertheless provide useful entry points and opportunities for a future reform of the entire security sector.<sup>77</sup>

### *External actors as drivers of SSR implementation*

National actors' cooperation with international organisations and bilateral donors can have a positive impact on the conduct of SSR, particularly in post-conflict states. For example, Georgia and Morocco undertook reform measures in cooperation with international organisations. The Georgian government's enthusiasm for SSR was driven not only by an innate desire to embark on such reforms, but also by SSR's anticipated impact on the country's prospects for future membership in the European Union and NATO.<sup>78</sup> At the same time, the reforms in Georgia benefited from the fact that the European Union and NATO set up roadmaps and stipulated clearly defined reform goals that were subsequently supported and sustained over an extended period of time.<sup>79</sup> Morocco, another case in point, has a long-standing policy of rapprochement with the European Union as an important political, economic and development partner. Its SSR activities benefited

from the creation of a legal and institutional framework designed to facilitate closer cooperation between Morocco and the European Union.<sup>80</sup>

Individual donor states also positively influence national SSR efforts. In the DRC, SSR received additional donor support in 2005 after donors had come to the conclusion that prospects for development and state building would suffer from poor progress in SSR.<sup>81</sup> This move came as an important breakthrough, as previously donors and the development community resisted support for SSR because of concerns that they would be implicated in the training of 'tomorrow's killers'.<sup>82</sup> This change of heart coincided with the OECD's decision to include the strengthening of civilian aspects of SSR in its definition of official development assistance in 2005.<sup>83</sup> The evolving commitment of the development community to strengthening good governance, democratic institutions and civilian capacity building within the security sector can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of SSR's contributions to long-term stability and development, as well as the need to embed it in institutional and legal frameworks that ensure accountability and a commitment to the rule of law and human rights.<sup>84</sup>

As the recipient of an extensive US military aid programme (Plan Colombia), Colombia presents an interesting case of donor conditionality. As part of the modernisation programme for the Colombian armed forces, the United States insisted on greater transparency, oversight and respect for the rule of law. As a consequence, accountability and transparency of financial management within the armed forces improved considerably due to the need to demonstrate improvements to the external donor.<sup>85</sup>

However, external actors need to be cautious about their involvement. Quite often – and this is the case not only in particularly difficult and challenging SSR environments – scepticism or even outright opposition to SSR grows from a feeling among local stakeholders that the concept is inappropriate for application in the global South. SSR is considered to be an alien, irrelevant or only partly relevant Northern-owned and donor-driven concept that would possibly look very different in both theory and practice if developed by countries with recent experience or in need of far-reaching security sector reforms. In some parts of the world a focus on human rights, gender equality, democratisation or good governance might immediately cause local actors to denounce SSR as Northern-driven ideological impositions designed to undermine traditional values and norms. As well, societies that have recently experienced internal

or international wars may be less inclined – and less ready – to take the necessary steps required for the establishment of peacetime security institutions. They sometimes view SSR as a concept that evolved in stable societies that have not experienced the immediacy of war and internal conflict, and thus it reflects a distorted and unrealistic view of security affairs and will inevitably compromise their capacity for national defence.

However, scepticism about SSR's Northern origin and presumed bias can be countered if external actors' SSR activities on the ground indicate that they are not only pursuing their own vested interests. Thus opportunities for constructive collaboration between external and local actors arise from demonstrated sensitivity to the local context. On the other hand, of course, lack of such sensitivity exacerbates already existing scepticism about Northern biases.

#### *Domestic drivers of SSR implementation*

In terms of opportunities and entry points, successful SSR relies on broad-based domestic commitment and willingness to implement reforms. Recent SSR experiences point to a number of factors that create momentum, space or pressure to guide and maintain SSR implementation, including global financial crises that necessitate downsizing the security sector and making it more efficient; domestic political commitment to change; the presence of very specific security problems, such as rising crime levels; and the existence of people's movements or civil society organisations that are actively pushing for reforms.

First, economic crises and unsustainably large budgets for the security sector may serve as an impetus for change. During times of economic hardship, governments are forced to downsize the sector to ensure that spending is commensurate with a country's financial resources. For instance, the government of Sri Lanka would likely find it difficult to justify excessive defence expenditures to external donors in the context of inflation, public debt and continuing effects of the global financial crisis.<sup>86</sup> Equally, Nepal's fragile economy cannot sustain high expenditure on its large armed forces.<sup>87</sup> Morocco suffered from an economic crisis and the International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment programmes, which threatened the country's social stability. To appease the people after their financial sacrifices, the king initiated reforms of the government apparatus

– including the security sector – to make it more efficient and more responsive to the people’s needs. The reforms of the government and ultimately the security sector were an attempt by the king to reach a new social pact between himself, the government and the people, thus also reasserting his own dominant role.<sup>88</sup> The examples of Sri Lanka, Nepal and Morocco illustrate that economic crises can entice governments to initiate reforms.

Secondly, as sustainable SSR cannot be undertaken by external actors alone, the presence of domestic political will and commitment is crucial. In several of the cases consulted for this study, national political leaders were not interested in SSR because either they feared that reforms would deprive them of their power base (the DRC and the CAR) or they lacked the expertise to initiate change (the parliament in Sri Lanka). In this context, the case of Morocco is intriguing: the king personally took it upon himself to initiate a reform of the security sector, including the adoption of new laws, new organisational structures and the appointment of reform-minded commanders and directors. Without the king’s authority and determination, these reforms could hardly have been achieved.<sup>89</sup> This experience again illustrates that SSR is much more than a technical exercise. It is a politically sensitive process that needs to be managed and guided by national leaders who are committed to change.

Thirdly, rising crime levels and accompanying calls for a more effective security sector offer a further entry point for SSR. In Colombia, growing conflict intensity along with rising levels of production and trafficking of drugs aggravated the effects of the civil war. The government hoped that security sector reforms would help in dealing more effectively with the rising levels of organised crime and spillover effects on the ongoing conflict.<sup>90</sup> Equally, in Morocco a rise in organised crime and drug trafficking as well as illegal migration forced the government to initiate a programme of SSR. As the king was convinced that high crime rates threatened domestic stability, he ordered various reform measures to be taken to make the police, armed forces, penal system and justice sector more effective. He also called for measures to protect citizens against abusive action from the security forces and address security personnel’s involvement in crime.<sup>91</sup>

Fourthly, in spite of the Sri Lankan government’s measures to curb citizens’ freedom of speech, the country’s civil society organisations have



been and continue to be vocal. Although they have so far not been able to influence the government's national security policy, NGOs are active as watchdogs, monitoring the security sector. They have also exerted pressure on the government and raised awareness about the need for the armed forces and police to respect the rule of law and human rights.<sup>92</sup> As a result of the security institutions' suppression of the 2006 popular uprising in Nepal, which led to a change of government, there is today strong public pressure – and thus an opportune moment – to reform the security sector.<sup>93</sup> In the CAR, a robust civil society actively called for reforms of the security sector, yet – as mentioned above – civil society leaders involved in national dialogues and seminars on SSR have been excluded from key decision-making processes.<sup>94</sup>

In summary, financial imperatives, political leadership, domestic security concerns and civil society can serve as powerful domestic drivers to initiate and facilitate SSR.

*Local ownership as an opportunity, but also a balancing act between effectiveness and sustainability*

There is strong agreement in academic and policy debates on SSR that local ownership is a key feature of successful and sustainable reforms. Yet practitioners are commonly faced with significant challenges and dilemmas in operationalising the principle of local ownership. A first dilemma stems from external organisations' sincere efforts to respect and prioritise local, national and beneficiary needs and requirements. Beyond honourable intentions, this requires adequate resources and a level of commitment, patience and staying power that few organisations are prepared to offer. Many SSR practitioners have too little local knowledge and understanding to choose the right timing, sequencing and support when transferring initially joint programmes into local hands.

Striking the right balance in honouring the need for local ownership is furthermore not only a matter of healthy respect versus blue-eyed romanticism. It is a widely recognised – if not always honoured – principle that is at times also abused. Accordingly, respect for traditional culture has served as the justification for striking overly close relations with dubious new political elites; traditional patriarchal structures are upheld that stand in utter contrast to principles of gender equality and contribute to the

continuation of high levels of gender violence in the aftermath of violent conflict; and local ownership has been seen as a quick-fix solution to establish superficial stability and legitimise short missions, personnel rotations and project periods, or to design (far too) early exit strategies. At the same time, the local population are not blind to intentional or unintentional misapplication of the concept of local ownership and become cynical about external involvement and cooperation between international, national and local elites in general, and SSR in particular. Thus what initially appeared to be an important entry point for SSR – the encouragement of local ownership – can turn into a major obstacle if not carefully handled.

Finally, a further dilemma stems from efforts to put national and local elites and/or civil society actors in the driver's seat of SSR programmes. On the one hand, practitioners recognise that sustainability invariably requires the direct involvement of local elites to give the process political credibility and generate long-term capacities for implementation. On the other hand, while the challenge is not to call off cooperation with local political and security elites, it is important to anticipate and manage their limitations, counterproductive motivations and negative impacts on the reform process. In the short term, cooperation with local actors will likely change the process and timeline of a project's implementation, a dynamic that must be accepted if results are to be locally owned and respected. A further opinion strongly expressed by practitioners holds that national elites cannot always be trusted and need to be counterbalanced by the inclusion of significant levels of civil society engagement. This clearly calls for an approach to local ownership that goes beyond considering government authorities as the only or primary 'local owners'.

## **LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The real-life experiences discussed in the previous section of translating the normative concept and principles of SSR into actual reform programmes on the ground help generate a number of useful insights about how to improve SSR processes in light of recent experiences, challenges and opportunities. Drawing on the specific case studies analysed for this paper, five sets of recommendations emerge: the need to take a pragmatic approach to SSR; the need to strengthen accountability measures; the recognition that SSR is to a large extent about change management; the need to give serious attention to gender mainstreaming in SSR; and the necessity to deal with the political nature of SSR. These lessons will be supplemented by a number of suggestions on how to cope with challenging SSR environments, and thus narrow the gap between ideal and real SSR.

### **Taking a pragmatic approach to SSR**

In theory, a comprehensive and holistic approach to SSR would involve all security providers and oversight institutions. In practice this is rarely the case. Indeed, in most if not all SSR contexts there is a striking discrepancy between 'ideal-type' SSR (as outlined in the first part of the paper) and SSR in practice. In the specific case studies referred to in the previous section, SSR efforts often included only one or two security sector institutions (mostly the armed forces and/or the police), while reforms were mostly

geared at making the sector more effective and not necessarily more accountable.

How should this discrepancy be addressed? Some analysts have indicated that a comprehensive approach to SSR is perhaps 'too slow and unwieldy'<sup>95</sup> and that the concept needs to be trimmed down to make it more easily accessible and user-friendly.<sup>96</sup> Practical experience shows that there is no golden rule for implementing SSR. Indeed, the UN Secretary-General's report acknowledges that SSR must be flexible and tailored to the country, region and/or specific environment.<sup>97</sup> As post-conflict and transition states often lack the capacity or will to take a whole-of-government approach to reforms (an approach that does not work particularly well in most donor nations, either), it is advisable to prioritise and sequence reforms of particular institutions of the security sector. The prioritisation of reform programmes should be based on a comprehensive review of the sector to identify its strengths and weaknesses and assess the impacts that reforming and changing one institution have on other institutions. Comprehensive security sector reviews should also take into account the political feasibility of implementing reforms.

While a pragmatic approach might result in the prioritisation of particular components of the security sector over others, it should not compromise the main objectives of SSR, which are to strengthen both the effectiveness and the accountability of the sector.

### **Strengthening accountability**

SSR experiences to date point to the importance of embedding technical modernisation programmes into wider governance programmes. There is a considerable risk that modernisation programmes alone might result in a security sector that is unaccountable, sets its own priorities and/or is misused by individuals or parties in power. For instance, assisting a country in setting up an effective and efficient intelligence service without putting in place appropriate accountability procedures and necessary checks and balances may result in an excessive use of special powers, corruption, the use of intelligence capabilities against political opponents and resulting human rights violations.

Thus strengthening the operational capabilities of the security sector needs to be accompanied by reinforcing the accountability of security-

providing institutions *vis-à-vis* the executive, legislature and judiciary, independent oversight bodies and civil society. Together, these six sets of actors form the governance framework of the security sector. For legislative and independent oversight bodies to function effectively, they need to possess six characteristics: functioning on the basis of a statutory law; access to classified information; investigative capacity; power to summon and hear under oath witnesses and security sector officials and ministers; independence from the executive; and powers to correct or sanction security sector institutions in the case of wrongdoing.<sup>98</sup>

### **Managing change through SSR**

SSR requires – and causes – complex changes and transformations of large bureaucracies, often under difficult circumstances. The experiences referred to in this paper offer some insights about how to manage and conduct these processes of change. Two issues in particular are important ingredients of successful change management in SSR: the need for political commitment, and the establishment of an institutional home for SSR.

SSR will not take place without clear political commitment, particularly by the highest political authorities in a country, which need to recognise and internalise the benefits of change. If they resist change, it will likely not happen. As the Moroccan experience illustrates, it is of great advantage if the highest political authority, in this case the king, personally manages change by launching a strategic reform concept, ensures that top appointments are in line with reforms, publicly endorses the reforms and reports on the results achieved. If, on the other hand, the highest political leadership resists or fails to support reform efforts, potential ‘movers’ (high-ranking staff) within the security institutions will be less motivated to support and promote reforms from within their organisations.

Although holistic reforms might yield the most comprehensive and possibly sustainable results, in reality most reform processes take place at the subsectoral level – for example within the armed forces, police or judiciary. Enhanced and effective understanding and management of the linkages between these institutions require the existence of an institutional home for addressing holistic reforms of the entire security sector. Such an entity or institutional home could assist SSR across numerous institutions in the conceptualisation, coordination and evaluation of reform efforts. The

United Nations has experimented with such an approach: within MONUC in the DRC and UNMIT in Timor-Leste SSR units were set up and staffed by multidisciplinary teams with military, police, legal and other SSR-specific expertise. Similar SSR units could be set up within the context of national structures, attached to a particular ministry or to the president's or national security adviser's office.

### **Gender mainstreaming in SSR**

Gender mainstreaming is important for SSR in its own right and as an effective tool to ensure that SSR processes are participatory and locally owned.<sup>99</sup> Security sector institutions need to be transformed into representative institutions that are people-centred and meet the diverse security and justice needs of men, women, boys and girls. Gender mainstreaming measures are also necessary for facilitating oversight and accountability and to curtail and punish sexual harassment and other gender-based violence perpetrated by security sector personnel. Unfortunately, as the case studies and expert consultations carried out for this study so blatantly show, SSR processes and activities are often characterised by 'gender blindness' – a weakness that can be addressed by promoting a more inclusive approach to SSR planning and implementation.

First, gender aspects should be an important feature of security sector reviews. Assessments need to focus on the degree to which institutions across the entire sector are representative, inclusive and respond effectively to diverse security needs, including sexual and gender-based violence. Reviews should cover accountability measures to address sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by security sector personnel. Second, the review process should be participatory and involve civil society organisations, including national and local women's organisations. Reviews should include an assessment of internal threats to security, with a specific focus on gender-based violence and disaggregated information on the security and justice needs of men, women, boys and girls.

Third, the review should evaluate security-related legislation, policies, protocols and practices to ensure they are not discriminatory and adequately respond to diverse gender- and age-specific security and justice needs. Fourth, based on the review process, support should be provided for the development of codes of conduct, sexual harassment policies,

institutional gender policies and other internal policies that institutionalise gender issues and enforce zero tolerance of gender-based violence. Fifth, recruitment processes should be gender sensitive, include vetting for gender-based violence, and establish strategic targets and specific initiatives to increase the recruitment, retention and advancement of women and other under-represented groups in the security sector. Sri Lanka is one of the few countries in Asia with a considerable number of women serving in its security and justice institutions. Given that many women and children have been victims of the ongoing conflict in Sri Lanka, 'a large number of female security and judicial personnel will, in principle, not only render these institutions more accessible to female and child victims, but will also build the potential to enhance confidence in such institutions'.<sup>100</sup>

Sixth, in line with institutional gender policies, SSR should support gender sensitivity and responsiveness throughout all security sector institutions. This can be achieved by various means, such as the delivery of relevant training opportunities and the establishment of gender focal points and other institutional structures. The latter could include domestic violence units and measures to support female retention and advancement, including mentoring programmes, female staff associations and the provision of proper logistics and infrastructure for female staff. Finally, oversight of SSR processes should be strengthened to ensure that oversight bodies (such as parliamentary defence committees) are gender responsive and collaborate closely with relevant civil society organisations.

### **Dealing with SSR politics**

In essence, SSR is a highly political process that influences and is simultaneously influenced by the wider political environment, nationally as well as internationally. It is important to acknowledge that SSR is not a purely technocratic exercise, but affects the power and interests of all major stakeholders involved. As already noted, the creation of political commitment, donor conditionality and peace agreements offer opportunities for managing the political sensitivities inherent in SSR. Thus reforms are more likely to succeed if they respond to a sense of urgency felt by government leaders and other relevant stakeholders that changes need to take place. Reforms must offer solutions to real and perceived problems

which are relevant for both the political leaders and society at large. In the cases of Morocco and Colombia, for instance, an increase in crime and terrorism created a sense of urgency among political leaders to address these problems, triggering the necessary impetus for the initiation of major SSR programmes.

As in the case of the US decision to assist in the modernisation of the Colombian armed forces in return for the strengthening of civilian oversight and accountability for human rights, donor states can condition their support on national SSR commitments. Such external pressure may help political leaders committed to reforms in generating support or, if they are less supportive of reforms as they fear negative personal repercussions, in externalising some of the blame for initiating possibly unpopular and politically risky changes.

Negotiations and dialogues that precede and lead up to eventual peace agreements can serve as useful entry points for addressing the political nature of SSR; they offer many of the politically most influential parties a rare chance to debate politically risky and controversial SSR issues and, through negotiation, find acceptable compromise solutions on which a subsequent SSR programme could be based. It may of course be difficult to reach a consensus on politically sensitive subjects, particularly when potential 'spoilers' of the peace process are sitting at the table. However, even the early identification of future SSR spoilers helps in designing a realistic and politically feasible SSR programme – and in preparing for eventual 'spoiler management'.

### **Coping with challenging SSR environments**

Practitioners invariably face – and need to cope with – a great number of uncertainties, inadequacies, difficulties and frustrations inherent in planning, promoting and implementing SSR. Based on the experiences discussed in the previous section, ideal SSR contexts do not exist. What can one do to overcome, circumvent or otherwise cope with the inevitable obstacles to eventually successful SSR?

There are a number of relatively easy ways to deal with some of the more difficult and potentially controversial components on an SSR agenda. One might choose to take a highly selective approach and focus on very limited reform priorities; compromise on main SSR principles and difficult



and sensitive issues; focus mainly on whatever national and local partners prefer or are willing to do; or surrender and retreat altogether. None of these options appears to be a promising approach to eventual success in achieving solid SSR results. There may not be any easy ways out when facing serious challenges. One always has to expect unanticipated pitfalls, particularly if activities are based on weak or false analyses – or, as is often the case, no prior analysis at all. Even when SSR activities are based on thorough reviews, effective and efficient implementation is not guaranteed. By its very nature the security environment is unpredictable. If challenges arise that threaten the ability to meet minimum tasks and expectations, however, rather than compromising on core issues it may well be worth delaying one's activity or starting with less contentious and sensitive issues until the environment has improved. Thus while striving for full success one must make exceptions and occasionally settle for the best possible outcome. However, as the 'best possible outcome' could also be no outcome at all, one should only accept compromises as long as strategic objectives and core principles are not abandoned. Instead of compromises, one might also skilfully and strategically define, identify and implement those small, feasible but important steps and activities that have the largest and broadest possible potential for making a positive impact on the widest possible range of security sector reform challenges.

The suggestions in this section have so far shown that the challenges encountered by those involved in SSR activities can be substantial. The size and nature of those challenges depend greatly on each individual situation. Particularly in post-conflict and other transitional environments, the context constantly evolves and can change very rapidly, making the typical SSR environment highly dynamic. This in turn requires SSR to be equally dynamic and flexible in its implementation. We now turn to a number of practical recommendations to narrow the gap between what is desirable and what is possible in applied SSR.

### **Narrowing the gap between ideal and real SSR contexts**

Based on the experiences consulted for this paper – the case studies, conversations with SSR practitioners and the authors' own experiences – a number of specific suggestions emerge to ease the challenge of meeting the most crucial SSR principles in even the most difficult reform contexts.

Naturally, as SSR and the settings in which it takes place are highly context sensitive, the significance and utility of these lessons will vary depending on each individual context.

*Develop a keen understanding of the local SSR context!*

SSR practitioners, especially external advisers who tend to be less familiar with the local context, need to be well prepared before they embark on specific reform efforts. A keen and well-informed awareness of the differences between SSR theory and the real-life political, economic, historical and geo-strategic realities on the ground is critically important when designing suitable and effective SSR policies and implementation strategies.

*Assist in making the local environment conducive to SSR!*

Some of the changes required at a larger scale in order to a prepare fertile environment for SSR include the introduction of the discourse and reality of democracy, allowing fairly free and open elections (and election campaigns) that pave the way for a new generation of decision-makers to come to power. Another factor is the marginalisation and management of SSR spoilers – both armed and political. It is important to ensure that local SSR initiatives are not stymied by an overbearing international presence that suffocates local projects and ownership while creating a less conducive environment for sustainable reforms. If necessary, local and external commitments need to span years and decades; and they must focus on the needs and requirements of the country and its people, not of particular individuals. Security institutions need to undergo a behavioural change and embrace a service-oriented attitude towards the population and the government. All actors in SSR need to demonstrate honesty and realism about the time required for effective change, without irresponsibly raising unrealistic expectations.

*Secure buy-in at the top!*

The support of political elites for initiating and maintaining momentum in planning and implementation is a crucial ingredient of successful SSR

processes. Donors are thus called upon to secure political will and support from the highest political levels before committing funds and moving forward on SSR programmes. The potential for securing such high-level support needs to be discussed in SSR reviews and assessments.

*Keep long-term objectives in mind!*

While trying to pursue those reform activities that seem to be possible at the time and under given circumstances, it is crucial not to lose sight of the main reform objectives and ensure that they continue to guide one's reform efforts. These include, in particular, accountability, transparency and other aspects of good governance of the security sector. While the path and, to a lesser extent, the timelines for sequencing reform activities are significant, they should not distract from the eventual achievement of these long-term objectives.

*Work towards small successes; avoid successive failures!*

Small successes can be crucially important for all actors involved. They signify progress and, particularly if they benefit a broad range of stakeholders, help portray the reform effort as a worthwhile undertaking. Securing small achievements and victories is moreover a useful strategy for building confidence and trust in the ability of reformers to achieve their longer-term objectives. In contrast, successive failures can reinforce suspicions that gaps between expectations and achievements in SSR are not being bridged.

*Be realistic about goals and timelines!*

It is important to refrain from attempting to do and achieve too much at once. Being overly and unrealistically ambitious also makes it more difficult to secure crucial support from those in the security sector who are hesitant about immediate and far-reaching reforms. One can take a holistic approach while not tackling every single reform objective in unison with all involved actors. Nevertheless, maintaining momentum for reforms among all stakeholders is crucial, as long as all are aware of the fact that sustainable results might require years or decades of committed SSR.

*Be clear on objectives and challenges!*

It is important to be aware of and communicate objectives, expectations, challenges and difficulties systematically and honestly, while setting clear criteria for distinguishing between SSR and non-SSR activities. This applies to interactions within the security sector, among national and local actors, among external donors and across all three of these sets of stakeholders.

*Secure and train the most appropriate individuals for the relevant job!*

When assembling a team of SSR advisers or selecting an SSR lead person or focal point within an organisation that will undergo reforms, experience has shown that it is crucial to involve only those who possess the required SSR skills, local knowledge and sensitivity to local political dynamics. This applies to both external and local individuals and organisations.

*Secure and groom local networks of SSR supporters!*

In-depth knowledge of the local context should go hand in hand with broad contacts among supporters of SSR goals and strategies. It may be useful to draw on their input from the planning to the implementation phases, as their support will be required to maintain the momentum of reform efforts once external and some local protagonists of SSR shift their attention to other challenges inside and outside the country.

*Be inclusive, but retain a healthy sense of criticism when dealing with international and local partners!*

Instead of working only with the ‘usual suspects’ – trusted and reliable partner organisations and individuals who have successfully been engaged in previous collaborative efforts – it can be helpful to engage much more deeply across the political spectrum and collaborate with a wider cross-section of society and potential partners. Often there are also ample but untapped opportunities to capitalise on grassroots organisations’ desire for positive change and their likely support for new security sector governance practices.

*Be transparent!*

Particularly for those who are promoting SSR and asking for significant (and often painful) changes in behaviours, attitudes and institutional cultures, it is important to project good governance principles in their own work. In that context, regular, open and transparent communication with all stakeholders reduces scepticism about and resistance to externally supported – and quite often also initiated – reform efforts.

*Do no harm!*

Especially in post-conflict situations, conflict analyses and resulting SSR programmes should be undertaken in a conflict-sensitive manner, ensuring that SSR is implemented in a way that, at the very least, does not increase the risk of further conflict and violence. All SSR actors need to understand, acknowledge and anticipate the possibly negative impact of reform measures on conflict dynamics.

*Expect, accept and learn from failures!*

Experience shows that it is important to expect and draw positive and constructive conclusions from occasional, yet inevitable, failures. Despite failures and setbacks, it is important to continue the dialogue and collaboration with international and local partners – as well as with actual and potential spoilers – on the concept of SSR and its long-term positive effects.

*Accept that there might be cases where minimum requirements for SSR engagement do not (yet) exist!*

In such contexts it is better not to take action at all than to take actions that will be counterproductive to long-term SSR and broader peacebuilding objectives. Careful and thorough SSR assessments and reviews will help in identifying and utilising the best possible timing and entry points for SSR activities.

## CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper is to assess the obstacles and opportunities for SSR in environments that are barely conducive to ideal-type SSR. For this purpose the paper gathered insights and lessons from a number of specific SSR experiences (notably in the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Morocco, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste), as well as drawing on the experiences of researchers and practitioners involved in the design and implementation of SSR projects. In addition to the difficulty of finding a workable blend of SSR activities for each context, those involved in implementing SSR are confronted with a diversity of opinions about how to proceed, with whom and when. Even under the best of circumstances this is a tremendously demanding and challenging task. In less than ideal circumstances, which are characteristic for most contexts in which SSR is called for, particular care has to be taken to be effective in materialising SSR objectives while simultaneously managing the numerous hurdles that will inevitably stand in the way.

At the same time, national stakeholders often view SSR as an imposed, top-down, Northern-driven agenda for remaking what is perceived – in their opinion not always fairly – to be an inadequate security sector. On top of widespread scepticism about the intentions of some of those promoting and pushing SSR, the approach suffers from a public relations problem. Among both donors and beneficiaries, its intentions and performance are often judged by its short-term costs, not its long-term benefits. Moreover, all too often quasi- or partial-SSR activities are

mistaken for full-fledged SSR programmes and are then, unsurprisingly, criticised for their failure to live up to SSR objectives and principles.<sup>101</sup>

SSR is a highly political process, shifting and reshuffling power relationships in government, the security sector and society. If pursued as intended – shifting power over a society's security provision from the few to the many – SSR puts security institutions in the service of an empowered society. It is thus part and parcel of democratisation efforts and the strengthening of good governance in transition societies.

The reality of SSR can be described as muddling through constantly changing, unpredictable and highly political realities. Empirical, bottom-up experiences are thus invaluable in developing norms for workable SSR processes capable of coping with demanding, often difficult, environments while not losing sight of the long-term objective of generating good, affordable and democratic governance of the security sector. It is these experiences which have informed this paper and which may contribute to developing more theoretically sound foundations for the impact of SSR on transition processes in post-conflict societies.

Perhaps the main lesson learned from this study is that SSR is a complex and context-sensitive process, for which no golden rule exists. The experiences reported and analysed have shown that further research is still needed in order to understand more fully the processes, challenges and opportunities of turning SSR principles into practice. Which issues deserve to be studied in more detail to help bridge theory and practice in SSR planning and implementation?

There are numerous areas in which research can potentially offer new insights on how SSR can be designed and applied more appropriately to improve effective and accountable security provision for both the state and the people.

First, the extent to which good governance principles are followed in the design and application of SSR should be empirically examined.

Second, the degree to which both security and development objectives are supported by SSR should be empirically examined and tested.

Third, the degree to which SSR is mainstreamed into standard practice of states and intergovernmental organisations should be examined and empirically tested.<sup>102</sup> Particular attention should be paid to the development and application of operational or technical guidance

documents, which are meant to translate evolving SSR experience into policy, programme guidance and practice.

Fourth, it would be helpful to examine how SSR as a conceptual approach to treating the security sector as a holistic, interlinked, interdependent set of tasks and actors finds inroads into training and capacity-building programmes of individual security institutions and oversight and management bodies. It would be particularly useful to explore the utility and impact of joint familiarisation and training activities.

Fifth, it would be helpful to explore how SSR has been planned and implemented by individual security institutions and oversight and management institutions. Who is using which definitions? Who is planning and implementing SSR activities with what local, national, international, academic and practitioner input? Which are the dominant conceptual discussions and practical SSR experiences in evolving academic, policy and real-life SSR discourses?

Sixth, it would be useful to explore how the strategic directions of national security sectors resonate with officially stated national security demands and priorities – and how these priorities resonate with actual realities of threats, risks and respective security and development requirements. In other words, how appropriately prepared is a nation's security sector for the tasks which it is expected to perform as a public service provider? Do official mandates, roles and tasks of security institutions properly reflect real security and insecurity environments?

Seventh, once security sector reforms have been implemented, are corrective, follow-up reforms required? Such adjustments to completed or ongoing reforms would ensure that the objectives for which they were launched have been or will be met in a sustainable manner and in response to actual security needs and requirements. This includes both security and development objectives of SSR.<sup>103</sup> Such further reforms would also ensure that new SSR-relevant standard operating procedures are effectively embedded in the daily work of all security sector actors to the point that reform objectives will be met as originally conceived. Periodic monitoring, control and correction mechanisms would need to be developed and put in place to ensure that SSR reforms are sustainable.

Finally, for the benefit of both analysts and practitioners it would be desirable to develop a simple methodological framework for the systematic analysis of success and failure in the design and implementation of applied



SSR. Such a framework would measure the relevance, extent and depth of reform objectives as well as their implementation record. This would not only facilitate efforts in advancing conceptual thinking on the opportunities and limits of SSR, but also improve efforts to design, plan and apply SSR programmes in highly diverse contexts. While none of these contexts will be receptive to universal SSR designs, they are in crucial need of tailor-made and flexible approaches that reflect evolving, often unpredictable, transition environments.

In conclusion, a sense of realism is necessary. There will always be a gap between theory and practice in a complex, policy-driven concept such as SSR. It will be practically impossible to close or bridge this gap; however, by learning from past practice it is possible to gain a better understanding of its main causes and symptoms and to develop specific and practical suggestions on how to narrow it. This will improve our capacity to translate the normative concept and objectives of SSR into workable, applied reform efforts that are both feasible and remain true over the long run to the SSR approach's core principles and purposes.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This paper draws on research originally conducted for Hans Born and Albrecht Schnabel (eds), *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009), particularly the chapters by Albrecht Schnabel, 'Ideal Requirements versus Real Environments in Security Sector Reform' (pp. 3–36) and Hans Born, 'Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments: Insights from Comparative Analysis' (pp. 241–266). The material has been revised and updated by the authors between April and October 2011. The authors wish to thank Yvonne Guo and Marc Krupanski for research and editorial assistance during the preparation of this study and Cherry Ekins for proofreading and copyediting the final text. Finally, we are grateful to Alan Bryden, Heiner Hänggi and Herbert Wulf for providing most helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.
- <sup>2</sup> See, among others, Heiner Hänggi, 'Security Sector Reform', in Vincent Chetail (ed.), *Post-Conflict Peacebuilding – A Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Alan Bryden and Heiner Hänggi (eds), *Security Governance in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005); Nicole Ball and Dylan Hendrickson, *Trends in Security Sector Reform (SSR): Policy, Practice and Research Workshop on 'New Directions in Security Sector Reform'*, Peace, Conflict and Development Programme Initiative (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2006); Dylan Hendrickson, *Key Challenges Facing Security Sector Reform: A Case for Reframing the Donor Policy Debate* (Birmingham: GFN-SSR, University of Birmingham, 2009); Robert Egnell and Peter Haldén, 'Laudable, Ahistorical and Overambitious: Security Sector Reform Meets State Formation Theory', *Conflict, Security and Development*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2009, pp. 27–54; and further literature in subsequent notes.
- <sup>3</sup> UN Secretary-General, 'Securing Peace and Development: The Role of the United Nations in Supporting Security Sector Reform', Report of the Secretary-General, UN Doc. A/62/659-S/2008/392 (New York: United Nations, 3 January 2008); Heiner Hänggi and Vincenza Scherrer, 'Recent Experience of UN Integrated Missions in Security Sector Reform', in Heiner Hänggi and Vincenza Scherrer (eds), *Security Sector Reform and Integrated Missions* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2008), pp. 3–4.
- <sup>4</sup> UN Secretary-General, *ibid.*, para. 17.
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, para. 18.
- <sup>6</sup> Civil society actors further include professional groups, the media, research organisations, advocacy organisations, religious organisations, non-governmental organisations and community groups. See Nicole Ball, Tsjeard Bouta and Luc van de Goor, *Enhancing Democratic Governance of the Security Sector: An Institutional Assessment Framework* (The Hague: Clingendael Institute for the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003), pp. 32–33, available at [www.clingendael.nl/publications/2003/20030800\\_cru\\_paper\\_ball.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2003/20030800_cru_paper_ball.pdf).
- <sup>7</sup> OECD, *OECD/DAC Handbook on Security System Reform: Supporting Security and Justice* (Paris: OECD, 2007); see also UN Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2002* (New York: UNDP, 2002), p. 87.
- <sup>8</sup> These definitions were elaborated by Hänggi and Scherrer, note 3 above, p. 15.

- <sup>9</sup> Herbert Wulf, 'Security Sector Reform in Developing and Transitional Countries' (Berlin: Berghof Research Center, July 2004), p. 5, available at [www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/dialogue2\\_wulf.pdf](http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/dialogue2_wulf.pdf).
- <sup>10</sup> Under the leadership of the UN Inter-Agency SSR Task Force, several technical guidance notes have recently been developed around the main themes covered in the Secretary-General's report. For more information on the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations SSR Unit see [www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/security.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/security.shtml).
- <sup>11</sup> For excellent discussions of the dynamics of local ownership in SSR see Laurie Nathan, *No Ownership, No Commitment: A Guide to Local Ownership of Security Sector Reform* (Birmingham: GFN-SSR, University of Birmingham, October 2007); Timothy Donais (ed.), *Local Ownership and Security Sector Reform* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2008).
- <sup>12</sup> See Albrecht Schnabel and Vanessa Farr (eds), *Back to the Roots: Security Sector Reform and Development* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012).
- <sup>13</sup> UN Secretary-General, note 3 above; OECD, note 7 above. See also United Nations, 'Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Role of the Security Council in Supporting Security Sector Reform', concept paper prepared by the Slovak Republic for the Security Council open debate, UN Doc. S/2007/72 (New York: United Nations, 9 February 2007); European Commission, 'A Concept for European Community Support for Security Sector Reform', communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, SEC (2006) 658; Council of the European Union, 'EU Concept for ESDP Support to Security Sector Reform (SSR)', EU Doc. 12566/4/05; Hänggi, note 2 above.
- <sup>14</sup> For the discussion on good governance and good governance of the security sector the authors follow the definition of 'good governance' provided by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, available at [www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp](http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp).
- <sup>15</sup> Heiner Hänggi, 'Making Sense of Security Sector Governance', in Heiner Hänggi and Theodor Winkler (eds), *Challenges of Security Sector Governance* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003), pp. 3–22; Ball et al., note 6 above; OECD/DAC, 'Security System Reform and Governance', DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, DAC Reference Document (Paris: OECD, 2005), available at [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/8/39/31785288.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/8/39/31785288.pdf).
- <sup>16</sup> For reasons of confidentiality, transparency may be limited particularly in the context of the intelligence services, which tend to be much more secretive about their work than other actors in the security sector. This adds importance to efforts by both state and non-state oversight bodies to remain informed of their work. See, for instance, Hans Born, Loch K. Johnson and Ian Leigh (eds), *Who's Watching the Spies? Establishing Intelligence Service Accountability* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2005).
- <sup>17</sup> While the focus on consensus holds for security sector governance, it only partially holds for SSR processes – which are inherently political in nature and thus necessarily involve political power struggles along mutually exclusive interests and expectations as to the final outcome of the reform process.
- <sup>18</sup> Kofi Annan, 'Peace and Development – One Struggle, Two Fronts', address of the UN Secretary-General to World Bank staff (Washington DC: World Bank, 19 October 1999), p. 5.
- <sup>19</sup> UN Secretary-General, note 3 above, para. 15(e).

- <sup>20</sup> United Nations, note 13 above.
- <sup>21</sup> See Albrecht Schnabel and Hans-Georg Ehrhart (eds), *Security Sector Reform and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2005); Wulf, note 9 above, pp. 6–7; David M. Law, ‘The Post-Conflict Security Sector’, DCAF Policy Paper no. 14 (Geneva: DCAF, 2006), pp. 12–15; UN Secretary-General, note 3 above, para. 36.
- <sup>22</sup> Albrecht Schnabel and Vanessa Farr, ‘Returning to the Development Roots of Security Sector Reform’, in Albrecht Schnabel and Vanessa Farr (eds), *Back to the Roots: Security Sector Reform and Development* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), pp. 3–27.
- <sup>23</sup> Albrecht Schnabel and Vincenza Scherrer, ‘Embedding Security Sector Reform in Peace Processes: From Theory to Rhetoric to Practice’, paper presented at annual meeting of Swiss Political Science Association, Geneva, 7–8 January 2010.
- <sup>24</sup> The discussion is structured along recurrent and dominant themes, rather than following a predetermined theoretical framework for the systematic analysis of SSR successes and failures – although this would certainly be an interesting proposition to pursue.
- <sup>25</sup> The case studies covered the Central African Republic (by Boubacar N’Diaye), Colombia (Wolf Grabendorff), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Caty Clément), Georgia (Duncan Hiscock), Morocco (Hanspeter Mattes), Nepal (Bishnu Raj Upreti and Peter Vanhoutte), Sri Lanka (Eleanor Pavey and Chris Smith) and Timor-Leste (Gordon Peake). See Born and Schnabel, note 1 above. The authors of these case studies based their analyses on extensive country and SSR expertise, and approached their studies as either ‘insiders’ or ‘outsiders’.
- <sup>26</sup> This section draws on an analysis of responses by a number of experienced SSR experts and practitioners to a questionnaire provided by the authors on practical SSR programme experiences. Individual responses have been integrated into the text, but without attribution to specific individuals. The authors gratefully acknowledge the following for their invaluable contributions to this section of the paper: David Beer, Caty Clément, Shay Duffy, Cornelius Friesendorf, Duncan Hiscock, Antoine Laham, David Law, Arnold Luethold, Hanspeter Mattes, Alexander Mayer-Riekh, Boubacar N’Diaye, Edward Rees, Marc Remillard and Bishnu Raj Upreti. The more general, intuitive and at times subjective impressions of individuals who have been in the midst of developing and implementing SSR activities represent ‘voices from the field’ that likely resonate with other members of the practitioner community. They also inform the academic community about the challenging dynamics of the application of SSR in environments that are driven by continuously changing local contexts and the – often unpredictable – dynamics of national and international political conditions.
- <sup>27</sup> Boubacar N’Diaye, ‘Security Sector Reform in the Central African Republic’, in Hans Born and Albrecht Schnabel (eds), *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009), pp. 53–54.
- <sup>28</sup> Duncan Hiscock, ‘Impatient Reformers and Reignited Conflicts: The Case of Georgia’, in Hans Born and Albrecht Schnabel (eds), *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009), p. 135.
- <sup>29</sup> Hanspeter Mattes, ‘Morocco: Reforms in the Security Sector But No “SSR”’, in Hans Born and Albrecht Schnabel (eds), *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009), p. 144.

- <sup>30</sup> Caty Clément, 'Security Sector Reform in the DRC: Forward to the Past', in Hans Born and Albrecht Schnabel (eds), *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009), pp. 102–103.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- <sup>32</sup> N'Diaye, note 27 above, p. 51.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- <sup>34</sup> UN Secretary-General, note 3 above, para. 50. However, since the publication of the report in 2008, various UN agencies have addressed the issue of intelligence oversight, notably the UN Human Rights Council. See UN Human Rights Council, 'Compilation of Good Practices on Legal and Institutional Frameworks and Measures that Ensure Respect for Human Rights by Intelligence Agencies while Countering Terrorism', UN Doc. A/HRC/14/46 (New York: United Nations, 17 May 2010).
- <sup>35</sup> Wolf Grabendorff, 'Limited Security Sector Reform in Colombia', in Hans Born and Albrecht Schnabel (eds), *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009), p. 71.
- <sup>36</sup> Clément, note 30 above, p. 99.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> Mattes, note 29 above, p. 148.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- <sup>41</sup> Gordon Peake, 'A Lot of Talk But Not a Lot of Action: The Difficulty of Implementing SSR in Timor-Leste', in Hans Born and Albrecht Schnabel (eds), *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009), p. 220.
- <sup>42</sup> UN Secretary-General, note 3 above, para. 17.
- <sup>43</sup> Clément, note 30 above, p. 109.
- <sup>44</sup> Eleanor Pavey and Chris Smith, 'Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Security Sector Reform in Sri Lanka', in Hans Born and Albrecht Schnabel (eds), *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009), p. 190.
- <sup>45</sup> N'Diaye, note 27 above, p. 47.
- <sup>46</sup> Peake, note 41 above, p. 229.
- <sup>47</sup> Hiscock, note 28 above, p. 126.
- <sup>48</sup> Grabendorff, note 35 above, p. 82.
- <sup>49</sup> Albrecht Schnabel and Hans-Georg Ehrhart, 'Post-Conflict Societies and the Military: Challenges and Problems of Security Sector Reform', in Albrecht Schnabel and Hans-Georg Ehrhart (eds), *Security Sector Reform and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2005); Laurie Nathan, *Obstacles to Security Sector Reform in New Democracies* (Berlin: Berghof Research Center, 2004), p. 2.
- <sup>50</sup> Pavey and Smith, note 44 above, p. 196.
- <sup>51</sup> Clément, note 30 above, p. 93.
- <sup>52</sup> N'Diaye, note 27 above, p. 57.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- <sup>54</sup> Clément, note 30 above, p. 106.
- <sup>55</sup> Bishnu Raj Upreti and Peter Vanhoutte, 'Security Sector Reform in Nepal: Challenges and Opportunities', in Hans Born and Albrecht Schnabel (eds), *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009), p. 167.

- 56 Pavey and Smith, note 44 above, p. 190.
- 57 N'Diaye, note 27 above, p. 49.
- 58 Ibid., pp. 49–50.
- 59 Clément, note 30 above, p. 100.
- 60 Mattes, note 29 above, p. 159.
- 61 Pavey and Smith, note 44 above, p. 202.
- 62 Ibid., p. 203.
- 63 Hiscock, note 28 above, p. 128.
- 64 Grabendorff, note 35 above, p. 82.
- 65 Ibid., pp. 82–83.
- 66 Clément, note 30 above, p. 100.
- 67 Hiscock, note 28 above, pp. 126–127.
- 68 Pavey and Smith, note 44 above, p. 203.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Hiscock, note 28 above, p. 128.
- 71 N'Diaye, note 27 above, pp. 50–51.
- 72 Clément, note 30 above, pp. 103–104.
- 73 Peake, note 41 above, p. 230.
- 74 N'Diaye, note 27 above, p. 45.
- 75 Clément, note 30 above, p. 91.
- 76 Pavey and Smith, note 44 above, p. 190.
- 77 DCAF's research division has since 2009 been assisting the United Nations in the development of a number of guidance notes on security sector reform (see also note 10), including one on SSR and peace processes. As part of this exercise it is in the process of conducting a series of case studies, which will be featured in an edited book to be published in 2012. For a preliminary background study on the topic see Schnabel and Scherrer, note 23 above.
- 78 Hiscock, note 28 above, p. 120.
- 79 Ibid., pp. 120–122.
- 80 Mattes, note 29 above, p. 149.
- 81 Clément, note 30 above, p. 93.
- 82 Ibid.
- 83 OECD/DAC, note 15 above, pp. 12, 24; DAC Statistical Reporting Directives: Addendum, DCD/DAC(2000)10/ADD1/REV1 (Paris: OECD, 2005), available at [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/36/13/31724752.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/36/13/31724752.pdf). See also Albrecht Schnabel, 'The Security-Development Discourse and the Role of SSR as a Development Instrument', in Albrecht Schnabel and Vanessa Farr (eds), *Back to the Roots: Security Sector Reform and Development* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), pp. 29–73.
- 84 On this issue see Schnabel and Farr, note 12 above.
- 85 Grabendorff, note 35 above, p. 72.
- 86 Pavey and Smith, note 44 above, p. 207.
- 87 Upreti and Vanhoutte, note 55 above, p. 173.
- 88 Mattes, note 29 above, p. 146.
- 89 Ibid., p. 158.
- 90 Grabendorff, note 35 above, p. 77.

- <sup>91</sup> Mattes, note 29 above, p. 149.
- <sup>92</sup> Pavey and Smith, note 44 above, p. 203.
- <sup>93</sup> Upreti and Vanhoutte, note 55 above, p. 179.
- <sup>94</sup> N'Diaye, note 27 above, pp. 50–51.
- <sup>95</sup> Hiscock, note 28 above, p. 135.
- <sup>96</sup> Peake, note 41 above, p. 234.
- <sup>97</sup> UN Secretary-General, note 3 above, para. 45d.
- <sup>98</sup> Hans Born and Loch K. Johnson, 'Balancing Operational Efficiency and Democratic Legitimacy', in Hans Born, Loch K. Johnson and Ian Leigh (eds), *Who's Watching the Spies? Establishing Intelligence Service Accountability* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2005), pp. 225–240.
- <sup>99</sup> Heidi Hudson, 'A Bridge Too Far? The Gender Consequences of Linking Security and Development in SSR Discourse and Practice', in Albrecht Schnabel and Vanessa Farr (eds), *Back to the Roots: Security Sector Reform and Development* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), pp. 77–114; Rahel Kunz and Kristin Valasek, 'Learning from Others' Mistakes: Towards Participatory Gender-Sensitive SSR', in Albrecht Schnabel and Vanessa Farr (eds), *Back to the Roots: Security Sector Reform and Development* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), pp. 115–143.
- <sup>100</sup> Pavey and Smith, note 44 above, p. 203.
- <sup>101</sup> This scepticism can be countered by devising SSR processes that genuinely foster local ownership and will lead to authentic local models for SSR while keeping with core SSR principles. For example, SSR assistance in the case of Libya, Tunisia or Egypt should lead to a Libyan, Tunisian or Egyptian authentic model for SSR. This would require SSR planning processes that are participatory and inclusive.
- <sup>102</sup> For previous work on this subject see David Law (ed.), *Intergovernmental Organisations and Security Sector Reform* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2007).
- <sup>103</sup> Particularly the development objectives of SSR, critical to its inception, are frequently neglected. See Vanessa Farr, Albrecht Schnabel and Marc Krupanski, 'It Takes Two to Tango: Towards Integrated Development and SSR Assistance', in Albrecht Schnabel and Vanessa Farr (eds), *Back to the Roots: Security Sector Reform and Development* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), pp. 321–341.

# Security Sector Reform: Narrowing the Gap between Theory and Practice

Albrecht Schnabel and Hans Born

Security sector reform (SSR) has achieved increasing prominence as an approach to assisting peacebuilding and development processes in transitional societies. Yet the persistent gap between theory and practice in SSR can be a source of much irritation and disappointment – at failures to implement SSR norms as well as in response to concepts and strategies that seem unhelpfully far removed from local realities. This paper compares the normative foundations, core principles and main conceptual pillars of SSR with the difficulties experienced in implementing reforms on the ground. It compares ideal-case SSR environments with real-life conditions of implementing SSR activities. In exploring how the theory-practice gap can be narrowed, the paper offers suggestions for better practice in SSR implementation. Arguments and findings are based on in-depth case studies, consultations with SSR practitioners and the authors' extensive conceptual and practical work on SSR. Despite the difficulties of design and implementation, this paper shows that the art of 'applied SSR' can be learned.

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