

Security Sector Reform + Governance: Reviewing Germany's Contribution

Security Sector Reform (SSR) has become a crucial feature of engagement in fragile and post-conflict states. International support for SSR reflects the conviction that an effective and democratically controlled security sector is a key precondition for sustainable development, peace and security. Comprehensive reforms of the security sector aim to enhance the effectiveness of justice and security institutions, and to strengthen the standards of democratic security governance. In Germany, SSR support has become a well-established element of the Federal Government's approach to crisis prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The 2015 conference 'Security Sector Reform + Governance: Reviewing Germany's Contribution' took stock of past experience in supporting SSR+G reforms with a view to improving Germany's future contributions to such efforts. This report summarizes the key outcomes of the deliberations.

1. Context and core goals for engagement in SSR

- **Crises appear to be pervasive** | Violent conflicts in fragile states have dramatically increased. The lack of functioning and legitimate security institutions is a key feature associated with state fragility. Hence, SSR + Governance are often a key element to preventing and transforming violent conflict. In supporting these reforms, SSR actors are required to adequately deal with complex and dynamic conflict environments.
- **As a core goal, SSR needs to improve human security** | SSR interventions seek to improve the security of the state and the security of populations. SSR actors are required to recognise that multiple, often competing, parts of society have different security needs. SSR needs to support a 'recalibration' of these different needs and adopt differentiated and individual approaches to each conflict environment. Ultimately, SSR will not be successful if it does not satisfactorily address human security as a basic right for each individual.
- **SSR is first and foremost a political question** | SSR is about power – and how power is managed. This often goes along with fundamental shifts in power relations. Therefore, local authorities sometimes act cautiously, and do not naturally follow international advice. Moreover, while domestic actors often lack institution and systems building expertise, international actors often lack context expertise.
- **Implementing our knowledge is a key operational challenge** | International actors have gained a lot of insight, but this needs to translate into programme planning and implementation.

2. Principles of engagement in SSR

- **SSR has to engage politically** | As SSR is a political endeavour, it cannot be limited to technical aspects. ‘To get the reforms right, you have to get the politics right’ – if the politics are not right, other SSR measures will not work. To be effective, SSR needs to be based on a firm political agreement in the reforming country. In particular, the crucial role of domestic inclusive political leadership and participation need to be taken into account in any SSR engagement after conflict. Countries engaged in SSR processes have to be encouraged to develop their own strategies and increase or develop ownership of the reform process, and it is these national processes which external support must be tailored around.
- **SSR has to prioritize democratic governance** | The democratic governance dimension of SSR, especially with regard to public accountability and oversight, is essential to managing the risks that are often associated with the strengthening of the tools of coercion of a state. As recent examples show, ‘stripping SSR to train and equip’ can be dangerous and does not work. In previous SSR programmes, the governance component has frequently been overridden by assistance which was geared simply towards the strengthening of security institutions.
- **SSR has to commit to constructive engagement with difficult issues** | Given the complex and difficult realities in fragile states, SSR programmes have to commit to dealing with thorny issues. This also requires finding a healthy balance between the performance and accountability of the security sector in contexts which are characterized by imminent threats. SSR programmes need to develop alternatives to completely drawing down support in difficult domestic circumstances.
- **Local ownership is key** | Local actors have to develop their domestic rules of the game by themselves. Determining results prior to engaging with domestic partners contradicts the ownership of local stakeholders. SSR programmes should adopt a more collaborative approach to programming and keep in mind that the identification of, and trust-building with, local stakeholders requires time. In order to work with local actors appropriately, it is essential to have a clear understanding of their interests and goals, the relations between them and the power structures (including parallel institutions). Trust-building measures should remain a basic component of the whole reform process.

3. Designing better SSR programs

- **Understand the context** | The consequences of getting support for the security sector wrong can be serious, in particular for the civilian population in the fragile settings where programmes or other initiatives take place. This increases the importance of good risk management (as there can also be significant domestic political consequences for donors), and puts a premium on conflict-sensitive ways of working.
- **Develop tools to better understand motivation and politics** | Given the complex political dynamics in fragile states and the risk of a politicization of reform processes, SSR programmers need to develop tools to assess these complex conditions prior to engagement, in order to meet the requirements of a Do No Harm approach. Including the intelligence sector in SSR programmes may be critical to allow for targeted interventions. Due to the complex issues that SSR touches, an in-depth conflict analysis at the beginning of any intervention is central for the success of any measures taken.
- **Start from needs, not from tools** | SSR programming must not start on the supply side, i.e. readily available instruments which have been proven useful in other circumstances. Rather, it requires a proper needs assessment, on the basis of which one can determine which SSR instrument is useful in the particular context. Joint needs assessments involving the donor community and the reforming country can be central in this regard.

- **Focus on realistic objectives and manage expectations** | Programs need to focus more on what is concretely possible in difficult contexts. There is a need for honesty and transparency about achievable goals. SSR programs are likely to progress at a slower speed and deliver more modest results than desired. Hence, overpromising, both vis-à-vis the domestic population and the international community, needs to be avoided. Actors on the ground should also not be overburdened by unrealistic objectives. At the same time, ‘if we give up on principles, we are lost’. Our shared values need to remain the compass in our engagement, but planning needs to focus on ‘tangible, realistic, people-focused’ best-fit solutions.
- **Include confidence building measures** | External actors have to earn the political trust that is vital to effective SSR, but initiatives and programs are often not capable of doing so. For this to happen, they need to excel in building relationships and include confidence-building measures that deliver short-term positive results. Yet, SSR initiatives and programs are often fixed, linear and focused on delivery of tangible outputs within set timeframes.
- **Design SSR programs to be adjustable and flexible** | An initial prioritization of measures and a preferred sequence of intended work steps are crucial in order to plan specific outcomes. However, in challenging environments SSR programs need to allow for up- and down-scaling depending on domestic dynamics, e.g. responding to windows of opportunity in due time. A flexible approach to programming also entails exploring opportunities and challenges of involving actors beyond the state that might be more suitable to meeting the security needs of the people.
- **Commit to longer time horizons** | ‘If we are not in it for the long term, we should not be in it at all’. This also implies a long-term high-level political commitment to support SSR.
- **Ensure coherence and coordination** | Engagement needs to develop a common understanding of the key problems and mitigating policies among all external players. Coordination is essential, also within the donor government. Moreover, SSR has to be linked to other policy fields to overcome self-isolation vis-à-vis other reform processes.
- **Provide consistent monitoring and evaluation** | This requires the development of useful, context-dependent benchmarks.

4. How can Germany engage in SSR?

- **Strengthen the whole-of-government approach to make SSR programs more effective** | The current frequent lack of coordination and cooperation between the involved German ministries should be addressed with vigour. The recently established Directorate-General for Crisis Prevention, Stabilisation and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in the Federal Foreign Office offers the opportunity to serve as a platform for cooperation and coordination.
- **Play a more prominent role in international SSR efforts** | In many countries, the added value of Germany acting as an additional bilateral SSR actor is questionable. Supporting multilateral efforts (UN/ EU/ AU/ others) can be a more adequate approach to combining efforts. Germany could play a more decisive role in international coordinating efforts in specific partner countries where this makes sense, based on a common problem analysis and under the lead of the respective domestic government. Germany should also put particular focus on supporting existing SSR initiatives in delivering strong, synchronized diplomatic messages to the relevant actors.
- **Reconsider comparative advantages of Germany in SSR support** | While having pertinent experience in building capacities of governmental partner institutions that feature prominently in German SSR support, Germany should also consider options for strengthening its engagement

with civil society actors that are accompanying SSR processes. As the important role of civil society in SSR processes often remains neglected in international SSR programming, Germany could strengthen approaches that specifically focus on civil society involvement in SSR.

- **Improve political and contextual analysis** | Germany should develop a structured, long-term mechanism that produces recurrent analysis on the possibilities and politics of security sector reform in selected countries. The aim of such policy initiative would be to increase the level of practical insight in the contextual specificity of SSR in a limited number of countries, which is scoped in a way that can feed directly into policy processes and programming initiatives.
- **Invest in elite and strategic leader engagement to enhance institutional capacity building** | This emphasis should not just be directed at the leadership in the security sector, but include all relevant levels in government ministries and parliament, especially officials in the Ministries of Interior and Justice. Growing professional competence and international democratic norms should impact over time to reduce potential public confidence deficits of the security sector institutions.

5. The case of Tunisia: SSR in Support of Democratic Transition

- **Build on existing work on training and equipping the Tunisian Police forces** | Germany arguably already has a trusted and preferred partner status in Tunisia. Key support measures should target the reform of police training curricula with a view to improving professionalism, emphasize democratic credentials and human rights and improving cost effectiveness.
- **Offer assistance in addressing accountability problems** | Upon request of the Government of Tunisia, an SSR program could also support the work on constitutional amendments, an SSR strategy and a security sector institutional change management program.
- **Offer to be lead nation** | The lead nation concept entails to coordinate and help to direct the efforts of other donor nations and agencies.

6. The case of Mali: Security Sector Reform in Support of Stabilization

- **Support a Malian security needs assessment** | Especially after the Algiers peace agreement, a locally driven assessment of security needs is an essential element supporting a sustainable conflict settlement.
- **Commit to long term political engagement** | Confidence building takes time, and the SSR process needs to be underpinned by a well-founded political approach. Hence, it is essential to have a longer-term perspective and a respective political commitment to see it through.
- **Identify partners beyond the political elite** | Civil society organisations should be empowered to advocate and to hold the security sector and the government accountable to the people.