



Lesson 18

Approaches to Security Sector Reform

Learning Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, participants will be able to:

- Distinguish security sector reform from other types of security force assistance programmes
- Identify important elements of SSR
- Identify a key indicator of SSR success
- Define SSR's relationship with related processes
- List civil society roles in SSR
- Identify characteristics of gender-sensitive SSR

This lesson provides civilians, military, and police with a common understanding of different approaches to security sector reform and development. The lesson details the different roles and responsibilities of the military, police, and civilians in government and civil society.

1. Definitions of Security Sector Reform (SSR)

The UN defines security sector reform (SSR) as “a process of assessment, review and implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation of the security sector, led by national authorities, and that has as its goal the enhancement of effective and accountable security for the State and its peoples, without discrimination and with full respect of human rights and the rule of law.”

The OECD defines security sector reform (SSR) as a process of “seeking to increase partner countries’ ability to meet the range of security needs within their societies in a manner consistent with democratic norms and sound principles of governance, transparency and the rule of law. SSR/D includes, but extends well beyond, the narrower focus of more traditional security assistance on defence, intelligence and policing.”

2. SSR is Context-Specific

The security sector in every country is unique; shaped by the history, economic, political, social, religious and other aspects of the local context. In every country, the security sector is constantly developing and professionalising. SSR aims to improve the effectiveness and accountability of a security sector within a unique, context-specific process.

3. SSR Terminology and Scope

SSR involves not only reforming and developing the military and police, but also addressing the wider security sector or “system” including intelligence, justice, security policymakers, and non-state armed groups. Some refer to SSR as justice and security sector reform (JSSR) or security sector development (SSD). Regardless of the acronym, all of these efforts share common characteristics to support accountability and effectiveness.

a. Accountability: SSR aims to improve democratic governance

SSR is a process that builds and improves checks and balances on the power of the security sector, including civil oversight. Ideally, SSR includes participatory, multi-stakeholder processes that include both civilian government oversight as well as oversight by civil society, especially women, minority groups, and youth. Civilians can play significant roles in analysing security challenges, shaping security policy and strategy, implementing security strategies, and monitoring and evaluating the performance of the security sector. Democratising security forces also can mean that one political group does not control and use the security sector against political rivals. SSR requires a transformation of a security system from one that protects the safety, economic and political interests of an elite group to one that protects all citizens, male and female including minority groups. SSR requires that the rule of law apply to all, including the state security forces. SSR requires a political commitment to principles of fairness.

b. Effectiveness: SSR aims to professionalise the security sector

SSR is a process to build and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the security sector. Some SSR experts assert the need for the state to hold a monopoly of force over other armed groups in society. SSR requires attention both to accountability and effectiveness. Improvements in the weaponry or training for security forces alone are not SSR.

4. Key Indicator of Successful SSR

Security sector reform aims to improve security – both national security and human security. The success of SSR is measured, in large part, by the perceptions of civilians. Do civilians feel safer? Are they able to work, travel, and live in their homes without fear of violence?

In too many countries, citizens run from the police and military, fearing repressive violence rather than looking to security forces for protection. An indicator of successful SSR is that the public perceives security forces as “protectors” and not “predators.” Figure 49 illustrates the transformation of public perceptions through an SSR process.

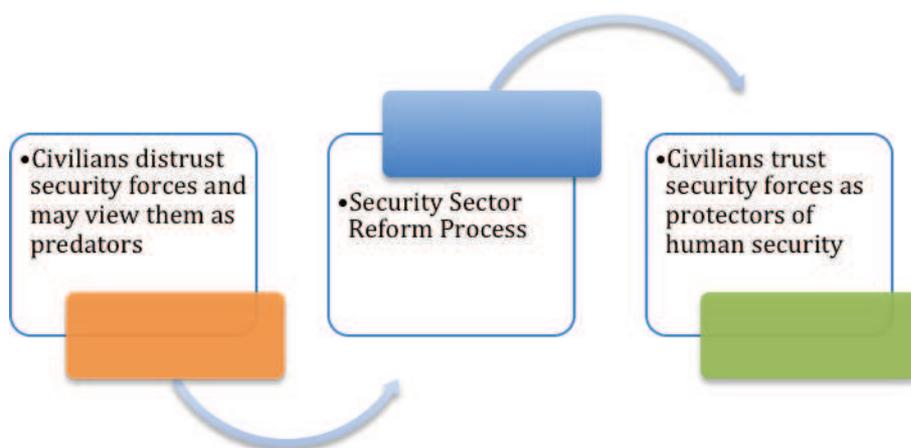


Figure 50: Indicator of Security Sector Reform

5. SSR supports sustainable development, peace, and human security

SSR emerged from the recognition of the link between security and development. Violent conflict frequently damages or reverses progress in economic, social and political development. On the other

hand, citizen-oriented states that provide public services and are accountable to citizens are critical to security and stability.

Abuses by state-run security forces are often an important root cause of violent conflict such as terrorism.⁸³ Reformed, citizen-oriented security sectors correlate with states being more able to prevent and address violence and sustain a peace settlement to end war.⁸⁴

Increasingly, donors in the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recognise SSR for its essential role in conflict prevention and supporting sustainable peace.⁸⁵ SSR is the single most important factor in determining whether a peace settlement to end a war will last.⁸⁶

SSR is important for achieving development goals in a variety of ways. SSR addresses the structural root causes of insecurity, creating an enabling environment for development. SSR aims to reduce corruption, abuses of power, and economic mismanagement, freeing resources to benefit development goals. SSR may reduce spending on police and military, also freeing resources to benefit development goals.

6. Local Ownership and SSR

Most reviews of SSR programmes identify local ownership as the most pivotal element in success or failure. UN Security Council resolution 2151 reiterated the centrality of national ownership for security sector reform processes, encouraging states to define “an inclusive national vision” on security sector reform, informed by the needs of their populations developed through broad national political processes inclusive of all segments of society.⁸⁷

Many experts critical of SSR argue that foreign donors and interveners have a tendency to ignore and exclude local stakeholders from the process of analysing and designing improvements for the security system. Donor approaches to SSR are fragmented, lack coordination, and lack mechanisms for listening to local communities or communicating transparent goals or processes. Local ownership often refers to superficial attempts to choose a few token civil society leaders, causing further conflict within civil society. The term SSR implies an unequal power relationship between “reformed” external actors reforming the unreformed.”⁸⁸ This stands in contrast to internal stakeholders reforming their own system. While outsiders often push SSR processes to speed up to meet the demands of fragile peace agreements or security conditions, moving more slowly but including diverse local stakeholders can actually be faster. Local ownership requires a move from external solutions and external regulation of SSR toward internally generated solutions and local voices that monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of SSR as measured by local perceptions and definitions of human security.

Donors attempting to foster local ownership and community engagement in security may not know where to begin. At the same time, civil society groups wanting to push for reforms toward a human security approach also do not know how to begin to reach out to the security sector. Lesson 10 in this *Handbook* describes local ownership and community engagement in more depth.

7. Gender-sensitive SSR

Women are often left out of peace agreements and SSR programmes. Women and men experience different types of violence. Both women and men need to be involved in peace negotiations and in planning SSR programmes so that they reflect the needs and interests of all people. Planners tend to see women as victims rather than actors. Planners often do not understand the operational benefits of including women or recognise that the success of SSR often hinges on men and women working together. SSR planners may also overlook the importance of recruiting and advancing women into prominent roles in the security sector. Research studies illustrate that women in security forces, particularly police and peacekeeping, are more likely to deescalate conflict with verbal communication skills and less likely to use excessive force.⁸⁹ They may emphasise brute strength rather than social skills, moral leadership, or the necessity of having both women and men work together to serve their communities.

- a. Recruit and promote women into police and military leadership
- b. Increase women’s participation in the design of SSR programmes
- c. Ensure women’s equal access to justice and security, including their protection from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

Security sector reform experts are producing new resources to provide guidance for gender-sensitive SSR.⁹⁰ Lesson 27 in this *Handbook* provides more information on gender mainstreaming in security.

8. Multi-Stakeholder Processes in SSR

Multi-stakeholder processes enable the transition illustrated above. Multi-stakeholder processes can earn public legitimacy and buy-in of all groups in society. National and local multi-stakeholder processes conduct joint assessments to identify security challenges, jointly plan security strategies, and jointly implement security programmes, and jointly monitor and evaluate security sector. The Coordination Wheel for Human Security illustrates the different aspects of local ownership in SSR.

Local ownership, democratic governance and civilian oversight are essential elements of the best practices in security sector reform and development. Module 10 in this *Handbook* describes a joint process of assessing security sector governance, accountability and performance. This is especially relevant to local ownership in SSR.



Figure 51: Coordination Wheel for Human Security

9. SSR-Related Tasks

A variety of processes relate closely to the success or failure of SSR, including the following:

- Diplomacy to achieve a political peace agreement
- Demilitarisation, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR)
- Small arms and weapons disarmament
- Mine action
- Elections
- Justice sector reform
- Transitional justice

10. SSR and Justice Sector Reform

Many attempts at SSR emphasise technical reforms of the military and police but ignore or give less emphasis to corresponding reforms and development of the justice sector. The justice sector includes legal frameworks, the ministry of justice, the judiciary and court system, the prosecutors, and criminal defence and legal aide.

The security sector and justice sector do not operate in isolation. If the justice sector lacks the will to apply the rule of law fairly to all people and groups or the capacity to gather evidence, prosecute and apply the rule of law, then it will not matter if the police do their job effectively. If the public does not trust the justice sector, this in turn reduces the trust in the security sector.



Figure 52: Link between Justice and Security Sectors

11. SSR, Human Rights, and Transitional Justice

SSR often takes place in countries where security forces and non-state armed groups have all committed atrocities against the local population. Recognising the historic legacy of violence against civilians and the lasting impacts of psychosocial trauma is essential. The ability of victims to hold perpetrators accountable is also essential to justice. Without acknowledging the past, it will be difficult for civilians to begin trusting security forces.

Transitional justice refers to society-wide efforts to address past human rights violations in order to do the following:

- Acknowledge the past
- End impunity and hold perpetrators accountable
- Reaffirm the rule of law and provide justice services
- Help the country heal and achieve social reconciliation

Transitional justice includes formal criminal justice processes such as International Tribunals, such Criminal Courts such as Sierra Leone's Special Court. Transitional justice can also include non-judicial processes such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs). A communications strategy for

addressing the past and explaining the SSR process to the public is important. Local advisors from diverse sectors of society can best design an effective public communication strategy. The Knowledge Hub on Addressing Security and Human Rights Challenges in Complex Environments is an important resource for addressing these issues.⁹¹

12. Amnesty versus Justice

Transitional justice processes sometimes offer amnesty in exchange for truth telling and accountability. Some transitional justice processes are based on the concept of “restorative justice” that highlights the victims and their needs. Restorative justice processes tend to rely less on punishment and more on other gestures such as acknowledgements, apologies and restitution to victims.

Many transitional justice advocates are opposed to amnesty, noting that it undermines the rule of law. This puts justice reform and transitional justice in conflict with SSR and DDR.

SSR and DDR (covered in the next lesson) both tend to offer amnesty to members of state and non-state security forces to entice them to participate in reform efforts aimed to bring an end to violence. Amnesty is important for two reasons:

- If combatants faced criminal charges, arrest and detainment in the DDR process, few would participate.
- If information gathered from witnesses in the vetting process for SSR were to be shared with a transitional justice programme, reprisal attacks on witnesses who spoke out against applicants for security forces could take place.

Too much or too little amnesty can impact security and justice requirements for sustainable peace. For these reasons, some experts suggest separating and carefully assessing the benefits and risks of amnesty processes related to SSR and DDR from transitional justice efforts.⁹²

13. Non-state security stakeholders and SSR

SSR processes increasingly recognise the need to include non-state security and justice stakeholders. In some countries, these non-state groups fulfil up to 80% of the security and justice roles in society. It would not make sense to exclude these tribal, traditional, religious and other citizen-based groups. Local ownership of SSR is essential, as local perceptions of security and justice may be very different than foreigners’ own systems or their assumptions about how security and justice systems should work.

14. Opposition to Security Sector Development & Reform

There are many groups that may oppose SSR efforts. *Political elites* may oppose SSR so that they can continue using security forces to protect political and economic interests. *Business or corporate elites* may oppose SSR because of their interest in profit from security contracts tied to security strategies that rely on weapons and arms sales, some profit from privatised prisons and criminal justice fees, or they oppose SSR because they want to prevent the transparency and accountability that would reveal illegitimate activities, such as forcibly remove civilians from areas where there are resources to extract resources for profit.

15. “Train and Equip” Security Assistance

In practice, many Western donors under pressure to improve counterterrorism and counterinsurgency efforts invest primarily in improving enemy-centric security strategies, with less emphasis on protection of civilians and human security. This is more accurately called “security force assistance” as it does not reflect all of the principles of SSR/D. Research on exclusive “train and equip” programmes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali and elsewhere emphasise that they can do more harm than good. Often, they may lead to situations where security forces simply use bigger weapons to repress local populations. They risk further undermine human security when they trap populations between increased violence of abusive security forces and the terror of non-state armed groups. The risk of security assistance to escalate violence is especially prevalent in nondemocratic states, where security forces lack public legitimacy and are thus at greater risk of engaging in abuses.⁹³

Many donor countries take an approach to improving the performance of the security sector that emphasises training and equipping security forces. These programmes primarily provide training in weaponry, intelligence and enemy targeting, with comparatively small efforts to improve protection of civilians and human rights. Some countries refer to this as “foreign security assistance” or “foreign military financing.” Evaluations of these train and equip programmes demonstrate that they can help democratic states achieve a monopoly of violence. But in nondemocratic states, train and equip programmes can have a range of negative impacts of providing weapons and training to abusive security forces that lack public legitimacy.⁹⁴

Most SSR programmes have element of both “train and equip” and “security sector governance” as they are two ends of a spectrum of approaches for improving the security sector. While both aim to improve the security sector, their analysis of the underlying problem and intervention goals are different. The “security sector governance” approach emphasises the problem of a lack of state legitimacy. The solution then is to improve civilian government and civil society oversight of the security sector which in turn links to “a monopoly of legitimacy,” protection of civilians and improved public perceptions of security forces. This approach to SSR attempts to address root causes of security threats stemming from the security sector itself. On the other end of the spectrum, the “train and equip” security force assistance programmes emphasise the central problem of the security forces lacking technical capacity to achieve a “monopoly of force.” There is less emphasis on whether the public views security forces as legitimate or whether security forces understand how to protect civilians.

| | Analysis | Theory of Change |
|--|--|---|
| Security Sector Reform | A lack of state legitimacy, a failure to protect civilians, and negative public perceptions of security Goal: a monopoly of legitimacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Build capacity of civilian government and civil society to oversee the security sector</i> • <i>Reform the security sector to prioritise human security</i> • <i>Training for security forces in protection of civilians and public engagement in national security dialogues for improved security governance</i> |
| Train & Equip Security Assistance | Lack of state capacity to non-state armed groups; Goal: a monopoly of force | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Training and equipping state security forces to hold the monopoly of force against non-state armed groups</i> |

Figure 53: Comparison of SSR and Security Assistance

REVIEW

This lesson identified the purpose and scope of security sector reform to foster accountable and effective security sector. This lesson described important elements and indicators of successful SSR, such as the public’s perception of security forces as “protectors” and not “predators. This lesson also described the relationship of SSR to other processes such as transitional justice, and distinguished SSR from other types of security force assistance programmes that focus on simply training and equipping security forces without improving governance and accountability.

Citations

⁸³ *Global Terrorism Index 2014*, (New York, New York: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2014).

⁸⁴ Monica Duffy Toft, *Securing the Peace: The Durable Settlement of Civil War*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁸⁵ Nicole Ball and Luc van de Goor, “Promoting Conflict Prevention through Security Sector Reform,” (London: Price Waterhouse Cooper, 2008).

⁸⁶ Monica Duffy Toft, 2010.

⁸⁷ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2151. Adopted by the Security Council on April 2014.

⁸⁸ Timothy Donais, editor, *Local Ownership in SSR*, (Geneva, Switzerland: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2008), 5.

⁸⁹ *Monopoly of Force: the nexus of DDR and SSR*, Melanne A. Civic and Michael Miklaucic editors, (Washington DC: National Defense University, 2010), 92.

⁹⁰ See for example:

- Gender and Security Programme at the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)
- Nordic Centre of Gender in Military Operations
- Institute for Inclusive Security (Megan Bastick and Tobie Whitman, *A Woman’s Guide to Security Sector Reform*, (Washington, DC: Institute for Inclusive Security and Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2013).

⁹¹ See the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed forces and the International Committee of the Red Cross web hub on Security and Human Rights Challenges in Complex Environments at <http://www.securityhumanrightshub.org> accessed January 2016.

⁹² Sean McFate, “DDR-SSR and the Monopoly of Force,” in *Monopoly of Force: the nexus of DDR and SSR*, ed. Melanne A. Civic and Michael Miklaucic. (Washington DC: National Defense University, 2010), 222.

⁹³ Michael J. McNerney et al. *Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventive Tool*, (Washington DC: RAND Corporation 2014).

⁹⁴ Michael J. McNerney et al., 2014.

Lesson 18

Learning Exercises

Anchor

10 minutes

Anchor the content in this lesson with an open question. Participants can share in groups of two or three people their response to this question:

- If you could reform the security sector in your country, what is the first thing you would do?
- What is one real-life experience led you to choose this priority for reform?

Add

20 minutes

Present the PowerPoint slides or ask participants to discuss the lesson readings in a small group.

Apply

25 minutes

The goal of this exercise is to identify the components of security sector reform and democratisation of the security sector. A peace agreement has just been signed in each of the scenarios. Security Sector Reform is one of the conditions in the peace agreement. In each scenario stakeholder team, discuss the following questions for fifteen minutes:

- What will your group do to support or undermine SSR?
- What are three priorities for reform? Which institutions or parts of the security sector would you attempt to reform first?
- How will you anticipate and plan for the way other groups may attempt to undermine SSR?

In the large group, role-play an SSR meeting where representatives from each group are asked to make opening statements. Allow each group two minutes to say what steps they think are needed in order to “reform” the security sector. After each representative has given their opening statement, ask the teams to step out of their roles and debrief the exercise.

- What are the obstacles to SSR?
- What steps could some stakeholders take to ensure there is greater local ownership and civil society engagement in the SSR process?

See the “Scenario-based Learning” section in the [Handbook on Human Security: A Civil-Military-Police Curriculum](#) for explanation of the scenarios and teams.

Away

5 minutes

To end the lesson, the trainer can ask participants to divide into groups of 2 or 3 people. Participants can share with each other their reflections on this lesson.

This Lesson is part of the *Handbook on Human Security* found at www.humansecuritycoordination.org

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