Security and Sustainable Development: an African Perspective

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A consensus has emerged in recent years among security thinkers and development actors alike, that security is a necessary precondition for sustainable development. This chapter discusses how the transformation of a national security sector might promote economic and social development. It focuses in particular on the African region, where varying degrees of insecurity have stalled development processes in many countries. The chapter provides a broad overview of the key security reform issues to be considered in efforts to create environments in which development can be sustained.

The role that the security establishment plays within various structures of governance often tends to determine the level of insecurity within a state, as well as the extent to which development can be achieved or sustained. For example, long term authoritarian rule (whether under military or civilian leadership) has often had the effect of excluding the majority of a state's citizens from access to political and economic power. In such cases, the main pre-occupation of the security sector is with maintaining the regime in power rather than with meeting the objective security needs of the state. Invariably, an inordinately large proportion of that state's resources are consumed by the security sector at the expense of the productive sector.

This pattern of governance in which greater attention is paid to the security of a regime as opposed to the security of the state has often provided the basis for conflict within many African states. Only a fundamental shift in the way security is perceived and the pursuit of a governance agenda that puts the citizens at the centre of security planning, can transform such a state into a stable one, where development can thrive.

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Opportunities for Transformation

Several factors have created the opportunity for transformation in African states in the last decade. Most notably, the end of bipolar rivalry and the resulting change in the international political climate meant that many African states could no longer rely on their great power allies to continue to provide support without questioning their internal conduct. This shift in global power relations created a corresponding shift in the internal order of many African states. Opposition groups, which were previously contained or repressed now found open space for dissent. Thus, pressure mounted (from without and within) against some states to reform. Some others did not wait to be pushed as they embarked on reform (e.g. Benin). Other states were not so fortunate (e.g. Liberia, Sierra Leone) as increasingly vocal and active opposition led to a rapid escalation of long standing internal conflict, resulting in bitter civil war.

Nonetheless, transition from old authoritarian systems into an environment of improved governance, conducive for sustainable development is not always smooth or peaceful nor is the process of transformation uniform across the continent. The nature of the transition would depend on the individual experiences of each state. At best, transition would require a strengthening of state institutions that have been weakened by decades of poor governance as well as a major transformation of attitudes and practices within such institutions, one of which is the security sector.

At worst, transition will need to address the consequences of violent civil conflict as part of a comprehensive reconstruction effort. The security environment in states where poor governance and unresolved conflict have degenerated into civil war is often characterised by a range of factors, which serve to compound peacebuilding and transformation processes in the aftermath of war. Such post-conflict environments have sometimes provided the best opportunities for comprehensive reform in Africa, including the reform of the security sector. The following are some of the factors to be considered:

- The withdrawal of the monopoly of the use of force from the formal armed forces, as power devolves downwards to the hands of other paramilitary groups, warlords, ethnic militia, private security groups, etc.
- Widespread proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

- Massive trafficking, abduction and recruitment of children and young people for use in armed conflict. The comprehensive disarmament and demobilisation of these young people is often a key challenge in the transition period.
- Complex humanitarian crisis, including massive displacement of people and influx of refugees into neighbouring states.

Transition from such societies in conflict to stable environments where sustainable development can occur often requires a series of multifunctional programmes and activities, in which the security sector would play crucial roles. Some of the conditions that would constitute immediate priorities in such environments include:

- Restoration of law and order, including:
- Return of the monopoly of the use of force to the state – in the hands of formally recognised security establishments guided by democratic leadership. The process of achieving this would entail a range of activities, including disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of various (formal and informal) security forces and groups.
- Transformation and strengthening of state institutions in ways that will allow for the creation of an honest, well-functioning state and a dynamic private sector.

Transformation of the Security Sector is Crucial

The success of the transitions described above is often dependent on successful reform or transformation of the security sector. The reform of the security sector is crucial for several reasons:

- Law and order can only be guaranteed when the institutions most able to ensure this embark on reform. Among them are the military and security establishments, which were previously found at the heart of the security problems that prevented stability and stalled development. Instability was created through coups and counter-coups; the use of armies for intimidation, harassment and repression of the very populations that they were supposed to protect, thus creating an atmosphere of distrust between the military and civilian populations.

- Related to the above is the weakening of the security sector, due in part to politicisation and decomposition of the security apparatuses. This has served to weaken the ability of the state to ensure the security of the population.

Studies on security sector reform have outlined a number of principles guiding sound security sector governance, and steps required to set in motion the process of transforming the security sector. Among these are:

- A clear and unambiguous statement of the key principles that will guide the management of the security forces;
- An outline of the government's responsibilities toward the security forces;
- Prevention of political interference in the chain of command by political a country's political leadership;
- provision of adequate resources to the security forces to accomplish their constitutionally designed missions, while ensuring a balance of resources between this and other goals.[1]

However, while the reform of the security sector will contribute to the creation of an environment where law and order is maintained, it is important that this forms part of a holistic reform agenda if sustainable development is to be achieved.

Africans recognise that "without the rule of law, democratic constitutions, a system of checks and balances in government, or viable and functioning institutions, sound security governance is impossible".[2]

In Africa, efforts at security sector transformation have varied from one country to another depending on the context in which reform is being undertaken. Hutchful and Fayemi, for example, offer a capsule summary of the different contexts in which reform is being undertaken in Africa:

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[1] See Nicole Ball et al., *A Handbook on Security Sector Governance in Africa*, 2003 (forthcoming).
[2] Statement by participants in the CDD-ISS-CIP workshop on Security Sector Transformation, Dakar, Senegal, October 18-19, 2001.

Security sector reform is taking place in a diversity of terrains, and reflects particular kinds of regimes and political transitions: consolidating democracies (Senegal and Botswana), post-conflict peacebuilding (Sierra Leone, Mozambique, South Africa), transitions from military rule (Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Benin) or single party dispensations (Tanzania, Kenya, The Seychelles, Cape Verde), conquest of the state (Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea), contested transitions (Burundi, Rwanda, Cote d'Ivoire), and so forth.[3]

Failure to pursue a holistic reform agenda often leaves many underlying problems unresolved. One example is the challenge, which corruption poses for development. Corruption within public institutions and among the ruling class is endemic in many African countries although the problem is by no means limited to this region. The net result of this is that resources for development are taken away into private pockets – a situation, which compounds poverty. Thus, it is important to ensure sound governance within a system of national institutions (of which the security establishment is one part), which create a peaceful and secure environment in which political and economic development can be sustained.

A Sub-Regional Approach Offers Better Opportunity for Sustainable Development

Even when comprehensive reform is embarked upon at the national level, there is sometimes a risk that this process might be derailed by developments external to the state. The African experience of the past few years has shown that it is not sufficient for transformation, whether of the security sector or other state institutions to occur in isolation at the national level, without a corresponding reform in neighbouring states with similar security and development challenges. The consequences of civil conflict can rapidly spread to a reforming state in the sub-region and ultimately impact negatively on the reform process. For example, the outbreak of armed conflict in Liberia was seen to have ignited war in Sierra Leone in 1991 at a time when the Momoh regime was initiating a referendum to return the country to multi-party rule. Similarly, the rebuilding process in Sierra Leone in the aftermath of that war was threatened by continued insecurity in Liberia. Thus, there is growing awareness among bilateral and multilateral actors that at the very least, a common approach to security and development should be

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[3] Eboe Hutchful and 'Kayode Fayemi, 'Security Sector Reform Overview', Mimeo, 2002.

adopted at the sub-regional. This has in part, led to increased focus on regional and sub-regional institutions in Africa, including the African Union, Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States. Part of the United Nations response has also included the establishment of regional offices – as seen for example by the recent creation of a UN Office for West Africa. The office for the Great Lakes region of Africa also takes a sub-regional approach.

SADC and ECOWAS have taken steps in this area in a number of ways. One is through commitment to certain principles, including for example, democracy, human rights and good governance. The continental body, the African Union has also taken steps to do the same. The New Partnership Initiative for African Development (NEPAD) initiative has been the most ground breaking continental agenda in this regard.

The Role of External Actors: Forming Partnerships with a Common Purpose

For a reformed security sector that will promote and ensure an environment conducive to development, it is important that the donor community and the ruling class, which would normally consist of powerful local/ traditional leaders, major religious leaders and higher ranks of coercive institutions, particularly the military, the police and the judiciary and wealthy citizens who command the economy, share a common view of what constitutes reform.

The perspectives of donors and local stakeholders on the purpose and nature of security sector reform sometimes differ. First, external actors sometimes operate from the assumption that a reduction in military spending would result in increased allocation of resources to the productive sector, which would in turn promote development. This has not necessarily occurred in many of the target countries. Second, many external actors are guided more by concepts of traditional security, rather than human security. Thus, opportunities to engage in comprehensive reform programmes are missed. Moreover, operating under the concept of traditional security only serves to benefit authoritarian leaders who require such an approach in their bid to consolidate their hold on power.

Thus, while the reform of the security sector is undoubtedly relevant to development and is indeed an essential prerequisite for sustainable development, its chances of success are greater when a number of factors are present. These include:

- Common understanding on the centrality of security sector reform in the developmental process among a cross-section of critical stakeholders and partners.
- A common set of guiding principles for sound security sector governance, to which all stakeholders subscribe.
- Recognition that the process of reform must be owned by local stakeholders and not driven solely by external actors.
- A sub-regional or "neighbourhood" to reform should be adopted if security sector reform is to create space for sustainable development.