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Meeting the challenges of SSR implementation in Africa

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Over the last decade or so, security sector reform (SSR) has become constitutive of the discourse around peace-building, development, and conflict prevention. There is little dispute either over the important role that SSR can play in stabilisation and post-conflict reconstruction. In Africa, SSR gained political currency and policy recognition, galvanising, deepening, and often leading the underlying international agenda. One might ask, then, why effective and inclusive security and justice institutions, responsive both to States' and to citizens' needs – SSR *raison d'être* -, are often so rare. The answer points to a significant implementation gap in SSR, and therefore to the need to address fundamental shortcomings in four core areas: good governance, political commitment, capacity, and sustainability.

From the African Union to each of its Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and other actors, African leading stakeholders in peace, security and development contributed to the global SSR debate, advancing an African understanding of SSR. The AU Policy Framework on SSR was approved in January 2013, building momentum to the UN Security Council Resolution 2151 on SSR, which was approved the following year under Nigeria's Presidency of the Security Council.

A recurrent deficit of attention or commitment to governance, has constrained the impact of many interventions, including programmes carried out over several years and with the disbursement of significant funds. Good governance of the security sector, which entails an emphasis on oversight, sound management checks and practices, and integrity-building, has often not been a high enough priority in SSR programming.

The commitment to good governance as a core dimension of SSR should not be derailed by setbacks in the political process, as is the case whenever apparently successful transitions are interrupted by armed violence, various types of instability, or terrorism and violent extremism. Good governance of the security sector

becomes, in such occasions, even more important to safeguard a minimum space for peaceful and fair political processes.

A continued emphasis on SSR capacity building at the regional and sub-regional levels will ensure that SSR processes are locally driven, sustainable, there is a wider lens to look at security challenges that are transnational in nature, and SSR processes have the needed holistic support and engagement – especially at the political level. Building effective partnerships is at the heart of ensuring that the international community is best able to appropriately respond to the needs of national actors with a coordinated approach, and that we are effectively able to share our experience and expertise when needed in all phases of the change process.

The evolving policy and practice of SSR in Africa has greatly benefited from mutually reinforcing continental and regional initiatives and processes. The most recent illustration of this dynamic is ECOWAS' Supplementary Act on the Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance (SSRG), adopted in June this year in Dakar, Senegal.

The way ahead is to foster SSR programmes that are not only technically sound but politically viable, locally owned, and fit for the security and justice needs in each context. It is a matter of authenticity of processes and objectives, which in turn set the bar higher in terms of sustainability, for instance opening SSR programming to sensitive and overlooked areas of security sector governance such as public finance management.

The adoption of the AU Policy Framework on SSR in 2013 was followed by a UN/EU-supported programme for its implementation ("Building African Union Capacities in SSR"), which ended in December 2015. It included the development of a series of SSR Operational Guidance Notes and conducting a number of Joint SSR Assessment Missions to African countries in need of support.

On 24 – 26 November 2014, we co-chaired the first Africa Forum on Security Sector Reform, which was held in Addis Ababa. It was a joint endeavour of the African Union, the Slovak Republic, the United Nations, the European Union, the African Security Sector Network (ASSN), the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) and its International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISSAT). The Forum offered a platform of dialogue for stakeholders and experts to consider the unique challenges and opportunities in engaging and supporting sustainable SSR programmes in Africa.

The Forum made a useful contribution towards the implementation of the AU Policy Framework on SSR. It came up with a set of key elements for consideration when preparing further SSR-related processes in Africa:
- National ownership cannot be imposed from outside;
- The importance of political leadership in SSR processes;
- Limited capacity was identified as a major challenge to building effective and accountable security and justice institutions in conflict and post-conflict contexts;

- African Union capacities in SSR need to be reinforced to better support the growing requests from its Member States;
- Coordination remains a key challenge to implement SSR effectively;
- Implementation of SSR must put an equal emphasis on the effectiveness of core security providers as well as their oversight and proper management;
- Good security sector governance, oversight and management, including in the area of public finance management, should be key priority areas for international support;
- SSR is an important peace-building tool;
- SSR is also a critical stabilization instrument;
- The crucial role of regional and sub-regional organisations in SSR;
- Focus on implementation of SSR activities on the ground.

Recently, the African Union has successfully assisted several of its Member States in identifying and addressing SSR-related challenges. Valuable lessons have been learned in countries such as the Central African Republic, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Libya or Madagascar, among others. Furthermore, the crisis in South Sudan may offer an important momentum for national, regional, and international stakeholders to use the existing policy, guidance, and tools to exert positive influence on the parties to the conflict and link SSR implementation with tangible peace-building gains.

The challenge remains to keep fostering the necessary capacities within the African Union and beyond to ensure that the AU Policy Framework on SSR is effectively implemented, harnessing international support, perfecting coordination mechanisms, and strengthening true national ownership around planning, funding, and monitoring.