Security Sector Reform

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In many conflict-affected countries the security sector—the military, police, secret services and intelligence—often have powers above the law. Sometimes, instead of serving the population, they are used by the state to oppress any form of opposition and increase the militarisation of society. In some places, powerful militaries have destabilised civilian governments. In others, the security sector receives a disproportionate amount of the national budget, in effect, redirecting resources from development to military expenditure. In the reconstruction and transformation of any post war country, security sector reform (SSR) is key.

Reducing the size, budget and scope of activity of the security sector and reforming it to become more transparent and accountable to its citizens is a difficult task in any country. Very few women or even non-governmental organisations (NGOs) enter into the discussions surrounding the security sector, as it is often perceived to be the domain of "experts" in the security arena and is sufficiently mysterious to discourage non-military individuals and groups from entering the debate.

But the nature, size and function of a state security system are critical to shaping the nature of the government and society that comes after a war. So it is essential for civilians, including women, to engage, ask questions and seek solutions.

1. WHAT IS SECURITY SECTOR REFORM?

The **security sector** refers to organisations and entities that have the authority, capacity and/or orders to use force or the threat of force to protect the state and civilians. It also includes the civil structures responsible for managing such organisations. Three components make up the sector:

1. groups with the authority and instruments to use force (e.g. militaries, police, paramilitaries, intelligence services);

2. institutions that monitor and manage the sector (e.g. government ministries, parliament, civil society—see chapter on governance); and

3. structures responsible for maintaining the rule of law (e.g. the judiciary, the ministry of justice, prisons, human rights commissions, local and traditional justice mechanisms—see chapter on transitional justice).

In states affected by armed conflict, the security sector also includes non-state actors such as armed opposition movements, militias and private security firms. Additionally the media, academia and civil society can play an important role in monitoring activities and calling for accountability.

The reform of this sector is important for promoting peace and good governance in the short and long term. In the short term, SSR is needed to ensure that:

• forces do not regroup to destabilise or pose a threat to peace;

• bribery and corruption are eliminated; and

• the sector (including leadership structures) is fully transformed so as to gain credibility, legitimacy and trust in the public eye.

If the security sector is not handled adequately and in time, it is likely that funds will continue to be misdirected, putting a severe constraint on the process of post conflict reconstruction.

In the longer term, SSR is typically understood to have four dimensions:

1. political, primarily based on the principle of civilian control over military and security bodies;

2. institutional, referring to the physical and technical transformation of security entities (e.g. structure of security establishment, number of troops, equipment, etc.);

3. economic, relating to the financing and budgets of forces; and

4. societal, relating to the role of civil society in monitoring security policies and programmes.

Transforming the political dimension begins with overarching discussions about the role of the armed forces in society and how defence policy is made and implemented. This may include public and parliamentary debate as well as input from civil society. In many cases, international donors press for democratic, civilian control of the military and other security forces—including control of their budget—and an independent judiciary.

In some cases, the entire shape and focus of the armed forces can be reformulated during this phase, as a new military doctrine is drafted along with a budget. In such a framework, the government states the nature, roles and intentions of its military forces (e.g. if it will be defensive in nature, or will be gearing up to face a known external threat). In **South Africa**, widespread public consultations resulted in discussions about "What is security?" and "What are the threats to the nation?" This led to a general shift from traditional military notions of security to a political framework that placed human security—development, alleviation of poverty, access to food and water, education and public safety—at the centre of the national security framework.

The institutional dimensions of SSR refer to the physical and technical transformation of these structures so that they meet the international standards expected of a democratic country. This is often the most difficult component of SSR, as powerful military leaders or institutions are often unwilling to give up their control or agree to be under the leadership of a civilian government. Moreover, since they are often the most qualified personnel to address security issues, their influence remains strong even in reform processes.

Steps to transform security institutions include:

1. transforming the structure of the military and security bodies, including, where necessary, reduction in its size through disarming and demobilising forces (see chapter on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration) and/or combining former guerrillas and the military to create a new national service;

2. instituting new recruitment and training policies to "professionalise" and "modernise" the new military and police forces (building their capacity, reorienting their focus and teaching new skills such as respect for human rights);

3. training and supporting reformed judicial and penal systems (ensuring their independence and accountability to civil society); and

4. fostering a cultural transformation so that previously excluded sectors of society (e.g. ethnic or religious groups, women, etc.) are included in security forces and institutions are sensitive to their needs.

The economic dimensions of SSR relate to the finances and budgets of the security forces. This requires the legislature or governmental bodies to determine the tasks of the new security forces and the appropriate level of funding necessary to carry them out. This may require actually increasing the military budget in the short term—e.g. to pay for reintegration benefits for demobilised combatants, retraining soldiers, etc.

The societal dimensions of SSR concern the role of civil society in monitoring the development of security policies and the actions of security services, and ensuring transparency and accountability on all issues. This includes public awareness activities and advocacy efforts by such groups as the independent media, religious organisations, student groups, professional associations, human rights advocacy groups and women's organisations.

As shown by the many activities listed above, SSR is a complex and lengthy process that involves most ministries and agencies of the government as well as all sectors of civil society. Obstacles to its implementation are many, but the ideal end result is a democratic, civilian-led security structure that is affordable and at the service of and accountable to the people.

2. WHO DESIGNS AND IMPLEMENTS SSR?

The plan for SSR is often laid out in an official peace accord. In some cases the accords are very detailed; in others a broad mandate is issued and specifics are left for post-accord planning.

The national government is the primary actor responsible for the implementation of SSR. Due to the nature of countries in transition from war to peace, or dictatorship to democracy, the military has often been a primary actor in government—receiving a large piece of the overall budget, playing a major role in decision-making in all aspects of governance and maintaining physical control over large areas of the country. It is highly likely in such circumstances that resistance to reform will be strong. Considerable time and resources, along with pressure from donors and civil society, are usually necessary for reforms to take root.

Support from the international community is also important. In recent years, international donors have begun to support SSR in developing and post conflict countries. Their focus, in general, has been on the importance of civilian control and oversight and good governance (transparency, anti-corruption, etc.) in the security sector. Their activities include:

- providing technical advice to governments on issues of fiscal responsibility and oversight;

- offering training programmes for military and civilian leaders in accountability, transparency and human rights;

- strengthening civil institutions, such as the ministries of justice and defence;

- supporting and building civil society capacities to provide input into and monitor the security sector;

- providing professional training for the armed forces and police;

- assisting disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes; and

- launching more in-depth bilateral partnership initiatives (e.g. the Australian Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands, which provides funding and technical assistance for SSR).

SSR is increasingly seen as part of the array of activities that contribute to alleviation of poverty and development. **The United Nations Development Programme** (UNDP), the **World Bank**, the **United States Agency for International Development** (**USAID**) and the **United Kingdom Department for International Development** (**DfID**) have become major actors in forging this connection.

There is a growing consensus among policy-makers and scholars that civil society also makes important contributions to SSR, including:

- facilitating dialogue and debate;

- encouraging inclusivity and equal participation of all communities in the discussions, a sense of local ownership of the process and the sector;

- promoting transparency;

- sharing knowledge and providing training on issues ranging from gender to human rights; and

- monitoring reform initiatives.

Advocacy groups, such as human rights and women's organisations, can press for reforms and insist on transparency, while raising awareness of certain issues through the media. For example, in **Nepal**, women's groups have trained the military in human rights law and related issues that will teach them how to treat the public. In **South Africa**, NGOs raised concerns about the environmental damage that military activities might cause in certain areas (e.g. depleted weapons systems affecting water or soil).

Community groups such as church organisations, trade unions and neighbourhood associations can represent the interests of their members at particular points, such as the reintegration of former fighters. They might lobby for longer-term resources to

support reintegration efforts or call for more skills training and development assistance. NGOs can also act as "service delivery" organisations, perhaps providing rehabilitation services to demobilised combatants or mobilising for community policing.

Local civil society groups can also be effective in vetting applicants for the police or military service to make sure that balanced representation from different sectors of society, and that former criminals are not recruited. In **Iraq**, for example, local councils offered to assist the US-run Coalition Provisional Authority in recruiting new Iraqi security personnel in 2003. Since they belonged to the neighbourhood, the council members knew who would be appropriate to serve in the police or army.

Yet despite the opportunities that exist, more often than not, civil society and particularly women are excluded or choose to stay away from these discussions. In the 2004 peace talks in **Sudan**, the subcommittee addressing security issues was made up of military commanders; no civilians or women were involved. In **Nepal** in 2004, the National Security Council was comprised of army personnel and representatives from the Defence Ministry and the Prime Minister's office, but no women were included. Indeed there were no high-ranking women in the police or key ministries of the Nepalese government.

3. WHY SHOULD WOMEN BE INVOLVED IN SSR?

The security sector affects men and women in different ways, given the distinct roles they play during war, peacebuilding, and post conflict reconstruction. During times of armed conflict and unrest, the actions of the security sector have a direct impact on men and women's lives. While military personnel and those holding guns deliberate security issues, civilians are the first to be affected by the violence and insecurity that prevails. Women, especially those heading households, are most vulnerable when public security diminishes and when security forces that do exist are predatory. Their perspectives should be sought in any reform process.

ABUSE OF POWER
Under military dictatorships and "police states" or other totalitarian systems, regimes ensure that their operatives are pervasive, not only breeding fear and oppression, but also causing a profound lack of trust within the population. In other words, it is quite likely that people, especially those from marginalised and oppressed populations, fear the police, rather than considering them as providers of basic security and protection.

Inevitably, the secrecy and all-consuming power that security forces wield in some societies can lead to all forms of human rights violations—from the most simple, perhaps harassment, to the most extreme, such as imprisonment without cause or torture. In **Nepal**, state security forces were infamous for abusing and raping women in villages with impunity until local activists took action (see below).

SEXUAL ABUSE AND COERCED PROSTITUTION AS ACCEPTED NORMS
The sexual abuse of women is common during times of conflict and in states where the security services are powerful. Yet there is much silence around this issue, as it touches the very heart of individuals' insecurity. Often neither women nor their male relatives are willing to protest such sexual misconduct. In the aftermath of conflict, such practices may cultivate a mindset that treats domestic violence and the trafficking of women for the sex trade as inevitable and therefore acceptable. In **East Timor**, political and social violence drastically declined following the peace agreement, yet domestic violence remained the same, accounting for 40 percent of all reported crimes. It led then–UN administrator Sergio Vieira de Mello to label domestic violence a "cancer" in Timorese society.[1]

But social taboos that prevent debates about violence against women, as well as women's marginalisation from political power, mean these problems are easily ignored when SSR policies are developed and implemented. In **Sierra Leone's** security sector transition, two years after the reform of the Sierra Leone Police began, "there are still complaints of corruption, insensitivity to gender-based violence, and failure to investigate complaints of rape and domestic violence."[2]

WHY SHOULD THE SECURITY SECTOR MATTER TO YOU?[13]

PROBLEM	CONSEQUENCES
Government unable or unwilling to control the military and other security actors.	Coup d'etat; democratic, accountable government unable to take root; human rights abuses.
Government unable or unwilling to manage military expenditures and defence procurements effectively and efficiently.	Public money wasted on unnecessary and/or overpriced equipment; corruption; poor level and quality of security.
Government enacts repressive internal security measures for narrow political gain.	Excessive military expenditures; democracy under threat; human rights abuses.
Defence strategy based on unreal or inflated estimate of threats.	Excessive military expenditures; possible inability to deal with wider threats to security.

4. HOW DO WOMEN CONTRIBUTE TO SSR?

There are few documented examples of women's contributions to SSR—the major case being in **South Africa**.[3] Models of women's potential activities in this area are detailed below.

WOMEN IN SECURITY FORCES

Women in opposition groups, military, police forces and intelligence services are in a unique position to affect SSR from the inside. It is important for women—especially in leadership positions—to bring a gender perspective to the discussions on security issues during the negotiations process. In **South Africa**, women from the Umkonto we Sizwe (MK), the military wing of the African National Congress (ANC), drew on their own experiences of harassment and discrimination and fought hard to ensure democratic representation in the new security structures, including the establishment of policies to ensure women's inclusion and equal status and participation.

Women combatants—members of rebel groups or government forces—can participate in aspects of SSR, including as part of the new institutions, but they have been given limited opportunities. Increasingly there is attention given to women in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes (see chapter on DDR). Yet in many cases, they are denied access to benefits, including education and employment. Typically, women participate in the new forces in far fewer numbers than their male counterparts. In **El Salvador**, women constituted less than six percent of the post war police force,[4] and in **Afghanistan** there were only 40 female recruits in the first class of 1,500 in the Kabul Police Academy.[5] Female police officers are typically assigned to dealing with "women's" issues, such as responding to victims of domestic violence or the arrest and search of female prisoners. Women are often given lower-status positions, such as clerical duties. In **Sierra Leone**, despite the hiring of women and gender training for the lower ranks, "female police officers are sometimes expected to do little more than cook lunch for the male police officers."[6] Yet in many instances—particularly where women are part of a broader liberation struggle—they have skills and understanding of issues that can benefit the security institutions as a whole, especially with regard to the forces' relations with the community.

WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

As parliamentarians, women can play a key role in demanding accountability and transparency from the security services; determining budgets and policies to ensure that military expenditures do not take away resources from developmental issues such as education, the environment, social services and healthcare; including the public in debate and dialogue on these issues; and ensuring democratic representation in the new security structures.

Security and Terrorism

The declaration of the "War on Terror" in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks in the US has led to increased militarisation in many countries across the world. As a result, in some conflict-affected countries, laws and policies against "terrorism" have been used to justify government crackdowns on all forms of dissent. This, in turn, has had a detrimental impact on the work of some NGOs and civil society peace activists, as certain governments have sought to co-opt them. Some governments have demanded that civil society groups provide information and aid or have conditioned their own assistance on cooperation against "terrorist" actors. In **Nepal**, for example, the army has blocked medical care and provisions to villages where they suspect Maoist activities. Across the world, civil society activists are not only denouncing these policies, but revealing that heightened militarisation is creating increased insecurity for many civilians. Women's groups in countries as varied as **Colombia** and **Nepal** are attempting to find alternative ways of dealing with the constraints.

In **South Africa,** women parliamentarians promoted public participation in the reform process by including NGOs when formulating new policies. They also took a stand, pleading for honesty and transparency when an arms deal was concluded without public debate and allegations of corruption were rampant. Women also criticised the government for spending scarce funds on arms instead of alleviation of poverty, and one key female parliamentarian resigned in protest over the deal.[7]

WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT

The leadership of women in governmental positions, such as ministers and other high-level decision-makers, can also impact the process and substance of SSR. Promoting women in decision-making positions at national and local levels is crucial to maximising their contributions to SSR.

In **South Africa,** as part of the establishment of transparent, civilian authority over the armed forces, a Quaker woman was appointed to the post of Deputy Defence Minister. Among other initiatives, she has convened an annual Women's Peace Table seminar that brings together women from the military and civil society to discuss issues such as the security needs of the country and the conduct of soldiers. Under her guidance, other initiatives in the Department of Defence—including a gender focal point, gender-sensitisation programmes and specific policies to remove barriers for women and promote their equal participation in security structures have been launched.

WOMEN IN CIVIL SOCIETY

NGOs and community activists have a vital role to play in security sector transformation, serving as expert advisors to the process, pressuring for reforms, representing the interests of their communities and providing much-needed services to fill the gaps in official work. Moreover, the involvement of the public is, in itself, one of the most important aspects of SSR.

Feminist and anti-militarist academics and experts have also offered important insight into the SSR process. In **South Africa**, they played a key role in shaping policies and monitoring for transparency and accountability. There are still few women, relative to men, with expertise in military security issues. But in many conflict areas, women peace activists have initiated efforts to include training on gender, human rights and rule of law in programmes for the security forces.

In **Colombia**, since 2003, women's groups have questioned the militaristic notions of security and have been working through their networks to redefine security based on humanitarian needs. In **Nepal**, since 2003, a women's organisation has engaged with the military, providing training to some 200 senior commanders on international human rights and conventions relating to women's and children's rights. Through interactive programmes involving senior military personnel and villagers, they highlight the impact of the military's harassment and violence and seek to promote protection of life and explain how the military's actions violate international norms. By 2004, a Steering Committee including representatives from **Save the Children**,[8] the armed forces police the general police, and the prime minister's office had been created to monitor

progress and support the creation of a training manual for military personnel in the field.

In southern **Sudan**, following advocacy efforts by women's groups in 2002, a series of meetings was organised between traditional leaders, women's groups, civil society and the civilian authorities to explore the role of the security sector in promoting peace. As a result of the discussions, judges and the police force entered into new training programmes designed to increase their understanding of human rights laws. New job descriptions were developed with particular reference to upholding and implementing international human rights norms in the context of policing and the judiciary. Women leaders at the grassroots level are also being trained to understand the relevance of security issues.[9]

Civil society can monitor the government's plans and pressure for reforms. In **Sierra Leone** in 1998 NGOs reacted against the government's plan to include men who had mutinied in the new armed forces, leading to a national dialogue on the role of the armed forces in the country. In **Fiji,** women's NGOs working with the Ministry of Women's Affairs met with the Fiji Government's National Security and Defence Review Committee (NSDR) as part of its review process in 2003. The meeting included discussions about how the review process was being conducted, who was being consulted, the issues being identified as security threats and how international standards and norms (including Resolution 1325) were being incorporated into the defence programme. As a result, women's groups made two submissions to the NSDR including recommendations for the permanent appointment of the Minister for Women on the National Security Council and representation of women on provincial and district-level security committees.

In the **Georgian** and **Abkhaz** conflict, women's groups drew on discussions around "human security" to develop common areas of concern. They found that for many internally displaced Georgians, security would increase by returning to their homes in Abkhazia; in contrast, Abkhazians found the return of Georgians to be a threat to their security as it implied a potential return to violence and revenge. To overcome fears of retribution, women activists on both sides are lobbying governmental authorities to pass resolutions on the non-resumption of armed conflict as a confidence-building measure.

Examples of civil society and government partnerships for SSR are increasing. In **Guatemala**, FLACSO (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales), a security-focused NGO, convened civil society, government representatives and members of the security sector in a consultative process to develop solutions to specific SSR challenges. In **Malawi,** civil society organisations contribute to the effectiveness of their community policing units through information gathering on crime and small arms, public awareness-raising activities and advocacy for legal reform.

Women are also very familiar with the needs of their communities and can advocate for budgetary shifts away from military to social expenditure. In 1997, in a petition signed by 99,000 women and presented to the UN General Assembly, there was a call for a reduction of 5 percent in national military expenditures globally and a redistribution of those funds to health, education and employment programmes over the following five years.[10]

At the local level, women's knowledge of community needs emerged at a conference of **Iraqi** women in November 2003. Their recommendations to improve security included: "Immediately ensure street lighting."[11] They noted that in dark streets burglaries, theft, kidnappings and other forms of violence were more common. This was a cause of great concern for the community. While the provision of street lights does not address the more complex causes of insecurity in such circumstances, it does help limit lawlessness and enable neighbourhoods and communities to regain some level of basic security.

Women can also be effective in community policing. In several post conflict states in response to a lack of security and an increase in violent crime, policing by community members has become a means of providing basic safety and security. The **UN Development Fund for Women** (**UNIFEM**) has sponsored women's groups in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Cambodia** that have conducted training for leaders of community policing to better respond to the needs of women, making the units more effective at enhancing security throughout the community.[12]

5. WHAT INTERNATIONAL POLICIES EXIST?

Very little attention has been paid to the issue of women's involvement in SSR. While **Resolution 1325** of the **UN Security Council,** for instance, mandates the inclusion of women in peace processes and post conflict reconstruction, formal statements from the UN and other organisations have not yet specifically addressed the inclusion of women and gender perspectives in the transformation of the security sector.

In both governmental and non-governmental spheres, studies have addressed the importance of civil society to these issues, although few mention women specifically. **UNIFEM** and the **Secretary-General's office** have issued reports that briefly discuss the role of women in SSR. Much more is needed to advance this issue.

6. TAKING STRATEGIC ACTION: WHAT CAN WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS DO?

1. Network with mainstream civil society groups and think tanks specialising in security issues to exchange knowledge and strategies and build capacity within your organisation to address these issues.

2. Educate women and men on SSR—its mechanisms, frameworks and policies, with specific focus on how to address the particular security needs of women.

3. Convene public meetings to determine the security concerns of the population and possible solutions:

   • raise awareness at the community level of the importance of engaging with the security sector;

   • utilise the media to initiate a public dialogue on the issue of SSR; and

   • publish findings of consultations and use them to advocate for broader public participation in security-related debates.

4. Identify and engage with key governmental and military actors involved in the process and present civil society concerns.

   • pressure all parties to include women and other civil society actors in security-related discussions; and

   • urge the government and parliament to consider the community's needs, concerns and input.

5. Work with and strengthen the capacities of women in official positions to engage in security issues. Ensure that they have a gender perspective in their deliberations and encourage them to meet with civil society groups.

6. Monitor governmental and international discussions regarding SSR. Comment and offer solutions through press releases and publications.

7. Monitor the budget, expenditures and procurement practices of parliament and the department of defence to ensure transparency and accountability.

8. Lobby for affirmative action and anti-discrimination policies to ensure equal participation of women in the military.

9. Lobby for and provide gender awareness and human rights training for those branches of security institutions most likely to come in contact with civilians (such as the police).

10. Convene women from the military, parliament, and civil society to discuss women and security issues, create a common agenda and strategise on steps to ensure women's perspectives are included in policymaking on defence and security.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND MORE INFORMATION?

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ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
FLACSO	Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales
MK	Umkonto we Sizwe
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSDR	National Security and Defence Review Committee of Fiji
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women

ENDNOTES

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3. For more information on South African women's involvement in security sector reform, see Anderlini, Sanam Naraghi. *Negotiating the Transition to Democracy and Reforming the Security Sector: The Vital Contributions of South African Women.* Washington, DC: Women Waging Peace, 2004. 1 September 2004 <http://womenwagingpeace.net/content/articles/SouthAfricaSecurityFullCaseStudy.pdf >.

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6. Refugees International "Sierra Leone: Promotion of Human Rights and Protection for Women Still Required."

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13. Table extracted from: United Kingdom Department for International Development. *Understanding and Supporting Security Sector Reform.* London: DFID, n.d. 8.