

# Security Sector Reform

Applying the principles of good governance to the security sector

### About this series

The SSR Backgrounders provide concise introductions to topics and concepts in good security sector governance (SSG) and security sector reform (SSR). The series summarizes current debates, explains key terms and exposes central tensions based on a broad range of international experiences. The SSR Backgrounders do not promote specific models, policies or proposals for good governance or reform but do provide further resources that will allow readers to extend their knowledge on each topic. The SSR Backgrounders are a resource for security governance and reform stakeholders seeking to understand but also to critically assess current approaches to good SSG and SSR.

### About this SSR Backgrounder

This SSR Backgrounder is about security sector reform. SSR is the political and technical process of improving state and human security by applying the principles of good governance to the security sector. SSR means making security provision, oversight and management more effective and more accountable, within a framework of democratic civilian control, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Since the late 1990s a number of countries have undergone national SSR processes, and SSR has become a pillar of international assistance in the fields of security, development, democracy promotion and peacebuilding.

### This SSR Backgrounder answers the following questions:

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## What is security sector reform?

**SSR is the political and technical process of improving state and human security by making security provision, management and oversight more effective and more accountable, within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights.** The goal of SSR is to apply the principles of good governance to the security sector.

**SSR concerns all state and non-state actors involved in security provision, management and oversight, and emphasizes the links between their roles, responsibilities and actions.** SSR also involves aspects of justice provision, management and oversight, because security and justice are closely related.

**SSR can include a wide range of different reform activities covering all political and technical aspects of security,** including among others legislative initiatives; policy-making; awareness-raising and public information campaigns; management and administrative capacity building; infrastructure development; and improved training and equipment.

SSR programming can focus on:

- *processes that affect how the entire system functions* – for example national security policy-making, gender mainstreaming, legislative reform, etc.
- *a particular locality or level of government within the security sector* – for example national, subnational, municipal, provincial, urban or rural security provision, etc
- *one area of security policy or provision* – for example defence reform, penal reform, intelligence reform, etc.
- *the role of a particular institution within the security sector* – for example the police, the ombudsman, a parliamentary committee, etc.

## ► Good security sector governance (SSG)

Good SSG describes how the principles of good governance apply to security provision, management and oversight by state and non-state actors. The principles of good governance are accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency. Good SSG means that the security sector provides state and human security, effectively and accountably, within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights. Good SSG is a specific type of security governance based on a normative standard for how the state security sector should work in a democracy.

For more information on security sector governance, please refer to the SSR Backgrounders on “Security Sector Governance” and “Gender Equality and Good Security Sector Governance”.

SSR can also include a broad range of state and non-state actors involved in security and justice at every level, from the strategic political level of government decision-making through to the internal functioning of specific organizations, the operational level of security provision and the public. At all levels, the goal of SSR is to align security provision, management and oversight with the principles of good SSG. Figure 1 gives an overview of the broad range of activities that SSR might typically include. **What makes these diverse activities part of SSR is the fact that they all contribute to both accountability and effectiveness in security provision, management and oversight.**

**SSR programming is different in every context because the security sector, the security environment and the political, social and economic impetus for reform are different in each context.** For this reason, best practice requires careful analysis of the reform environment during the planning, design, implementation and evaluation phases of SSR. For more information on SSR programming and policy guidance, please see the list of further resources at the end of this SSR Backgrounder.

**Figure 1** Some examples of the broad range of activities that SSR might include**Accountability and Effectiveness****Strategic-level SSR activities**

Ensuring legal, political and policy frameworks reflect good governance of the security sector

For example:

- strengthening the legal basis for civilian supremacy, democratic control and political neutrality of the security sector.
- improving legislative frameworks for both state and non-state security providers, including separation of internal and external security missions, transparent national security policy-making and formal oversight of public, private and commercial security providers.
- auditing performance through parliamentary, independent and judicial oversight mechanisms.
- ensuring political and financial independence for oversight institutions, and strengthening them.
- raising public awareness about good SSG and improving capacity and access for public engagement and scrutiny through civil society and the media.
- improving frameworks for interagency, regional and international security cooperation.

**Organizational-level SSR activities**

Making security sector institutions more effective and more accountable

For example:

- changing organizational structures to improve control and management of service delivery.
- improving systems for internal control and supervision within security sector institutions, including internal regulations, codes of conduct, complaints processes and disciplinary standards, ect.
- ensuring transparency in rules, regulations and decision-making.
- fostering equal opportunity and representation at all organizational levels.
- improving how public and private security providers engage in security provision.
- raising standards of professional management and administration in human and financial resources, including effective, merit-based recruitment, promotions and benefits.

**Operational-level SSR activities**

Ensuring security sector institutions deliver security more effectively and more accountably

For example:

- raising professional standards of service delivery and improving oversight and accountability of security provision.
- improving rules and procedures of good conduct for state and non-state security sector actors, based on respect for rule of law and human rights.
- improving engagement between the public and the security sector, including public access to information, reporting and complaints mechanisms
- fostering a service-oriented attitude and approach to security provision.
- assuring appropriate training, experience and equipment for security personnel.
- providing effective organizational, managerial and administrative support for security personnel.
- ensuring equal access to security and justice for all sectors of the population.

### Why reform the security sector?

**A security sector which is not effective cannot deliver security, while a security sector that is not accountable endangers both the population and the state.** A security sector that is ineffective and unaccountable causes a number of problems that SSR can help to solve.

**SSR improves the ability of the security sector to provide state and human security.** An ineffective and unaccountable security sector cannot credibly perform its missions in national defence, law enforcement or public assistance, and itself poses a threat to both the state and the population.

**SSR makes the use of public resources in the security sector more efficient.** An inefficient security sector wastes public resources, diverting funding from other essential public services and potentially burdening the state with unnecessary debt.

**SSR reduces opportunities for corruption by improving oversight and professionalism.** An ineffective and unaccountable security sector encourages corrupt practices that undermine good governance across the public and private sectors, with negative consequences for economic, social and political development.

**SSR protects the professional independence of security personnel so that they can effectively fulfil their legitimate missions.** An unaccountable security sector is vulnerable to interference from civilian politicians, who may force security personnel to perform acts illegal under national and international law, or manipulate the security forces in their competition for political power.

**SSR raises professional standards and strengthens accountability, reducing abuse of the population.** An ineffective and unaccountable security sector abuses its power, because security personnel are either incompetent or act out of personal, political or corporatist interest.

**SSR promotes inclusive security provision and equal opportunity within the security sector.** A security sector that fails to recognize the different security needs of men, women, boys and girls of all social, ethnic and religious backgrounds is discriminatory and cannot provide security effectively to the entire population.

**SSR prevents conflict by promoting unity, political neutrality, equality and professionalism within the security sector.** An ineffective and unaccountable security sector may intervene in politics, usually furthering the interests of a powerful elite over the interests of the public, and often causing violent conflict.

**SSR provides for national defence while contributing to international peace and security.** An ineffective and unaccountable security sector poses a threat to other states, either by harbouring potentially hostile criminal or political elements or by succumbing itself to violent conflict.

### What makes SSR different from other kinds of security reform?

In SSR, effectiveness and accountability in security provision are inseparable goals, and as a result there are certain characteristics that make SSR different from other types of security reform that focus only on training and equipping security forces to improve technical effectiveness, such as defence or security assistance for example.

**SSR is about good governance.** SSR is frequently misunderstood to include any change that affects how security organizations function, but SSR is different from other types of security reform because it focuses on improving both effectiveness and accountability. Other types of reform might focus only on modernization or the effectiveness of security institutions, but such reforms do not amount to SSR unless they also provide for accountability within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights.

**SSR is about both state and human security.** This means recognizing that individuals and their communities have different security needs, and improving the ability of state security providers to meet those needs. Improving security for people and their communities also means ensuring that the state is protected by security services that effectively fulfil their legitimate missions in providing for national defence and public security. Changes to the security sector that pit state security against human security, or provide security for one part of the population at the cost of another, contribute to insecurity and are inconsistent with the definition of SSR.

**SSR is rooted in national/local ownership.** SSR can only succeed when it is the product of the national and local actors whose human and state security it affects. National/local ownership refers to national governments, but also to the people whose security is at stake. This means that national/local actors need to lead the reform process, but it also means that reform must be carried out in a way that is participatory, inclusive and respectful of the distinct security and justice needs of individuals and communities. External support to SSR is often necessary, but reforms imposed from above or from outside will lack legitimacy, and are unlikely to reflect the local security context or the needs of the population. For these reasons, national/local ownership is a fundamental principle of SSR.

**SSR is holistic.** SSR is based on the idea that security provision depends on how all parts of the security sector work together, including both state and non-state actors: for example, there will be dangerous gaps and overlaps in security provision if the respective roles and responsibilities of security providers such as the military, the police and commercial security companies are not clearly defined; the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight affects security policy; the effectiveness of management bodies, such as ministries, impacts how security forces perform, etc. Activities that improve one aspect of security provision or oversight at the cost of effectiveness or accountability in another part of the security sector are not consistent with the definition of SSR because they can endanger both state and human security.

**SSR is a long-term endeavour.** Changing how the security sector works is a long-term endeavour because it involves changing expectations, habits and norms as well as institutional rules and professional practices. Some improvements in security sector governance can be made relatively quickly, but achieving good SSG takes decades or generations, not months or years. Maintaining good SSG also requires constant ongoing adjustment as new challenges to state and human security arise, both externally and internally.

## What types of situations might call for SSR?

**Good SSG is a matter of constant adjustment, and every state could take steps to improve aspects of its own security sector governance.** No state security sector ever reflects all of the principles of good SSG perfectly, because the security environment changes and adaptations are necessary. For this reason the need to conduct SSR may stem from a diverse range of political circumstances or technical reforms.

Typical situations that may call for SSR include the following.

- **Reforms to the political system.** In states undergoing democratic transitions, SSR is necessary to consolidate nascent democracy.
- **Transitional justice processes.** Where the security sector has a legacy of violence against the population, transitional justice initiatives may require SSR.
- **Peace processes.** Creating a security sector that guarantees security for all members of the population on an equal basis can prevent violent conflict, and for this reason SSR is often a requirement written into peace agreements.
- **Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes.** DDR has direct impacts on the size and nature of the security sector, and for this reason DDR and SSR are best considered together.
- **National development plans and poverty reduction strategies.** Because SSR contributes to a more stable and more democratic political environment necessary for development, it is often included in development planning and strategies.
- **Public financial management reforms.** SSR is part of public financial management reform because it involves ensuring that the security sector uses public resources efficiently.

► **The security sector** The security sector is composed of all the structures, institutions and personnel responsible for security provision, management and oversight at national and local levels, including both:

- **security providers**, such as the armed forces, police, border guards, intelligence services, penal and corrections institutions and commercial and non-state security actors, among many others;
- **security management and oversight bodies**, such as government ministries, parliament, special statutory oversight institutions, parts of the justice sector and civil society actors with a stake in high standards of public security provision, including women's organizations and the media, among others.

There are different definitions of the security sector, but SSR is based on a broad understanding of the sector which incorporates all security provision, management and oversight bodies, including both military and non-military security institutions and state and non-state actors.

For more information on the security sector, please refer to the SSR Backgrounder on "The Security Sector".

- **Rule of law reforms.** Justice is directly linked to security, so SSR is relevant to reforms improving the effectiveness and accountability of the justice sector.
- **National security policy-making.** When states review their national security policy and strategy, or develop new ones, SSR is often required to implement the policy.

### What difference does a name make?

**Different actors sometimes prefer different terms to describe SSR in order to emphasize a different aspect of the SSR agenda or because use of the word “reform” is politically sensitive:** for example, *security system reform* emphasizes the interconnection between security actors that were once considered separately; *security sector transformation* emphasizes the need for a clean break with the past; *justice and security sector reform* reminds us that justice and security must be considered together; *safety, security and access to justice* emphasizes a people-centred perspective; *security sector reconstruction* underlines the scale of the challenge of building new security institutions after war; and *security sector development* can be used to highlight that state and human security are essential for development, or simply to avoid the term “reform”.

**These terms serve as different names for the same SSR agenda when they share a commitment to the principles of good SSG,** which means improving both the accountability and effectiveness of security provision, management and oversight, within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights. **Reforms that do not reflect this aim cannot properly be considered SSR, regardless of their title.**

► **SSR and gender equality** SSR is about improving both state and human security, and this means recognizing that different people have different security needs based on their identity. Gender is an aspect of identity that depends on the different social and cultural roles men and women play in their societies, and the differences between these roles are important to SSR because they affect the security of every individual: for example, globally, young men are exponentially more likely to fall victim to gun violence, while women are more likely to experience physical violence in the home; and girls are more often victims of human trafficking, while boys are more vulnerable to gang violence. Recognizing such differences in security needs improves the effectiveness of security delivery, but it also improves accountability and local ownership. For example, recruiting women makes the security forces more representative of the population they serve; consulting women and men equally on security issues enhances local ownership by better adapting SSR to the local socio-cultural context; and consultation with women’s advocacy groups and balanced participation between men and women in security oversight can reveal new perspectives on security policy and performance. Assuring respect for gender equality in the security sector is a constituent part of establishing good SSG and therefore an essential aspect of SSR.

For further information please see the SSR Backgrounders on “Gender Equality and Good Security Sector Governance” and “Gender Equality and Security Sector Reform”.

### **Where did SSR come from?**

There is nothing new to the idea that security provision should be effective and accountable within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights, but SSR first emerged as a distinct policy agenda only after the end of the Cold War. During the 1990s the experiences of South Africa, Indonesia and countries in Eastern Europe provided influential examples of comprehensive national reforms to improve SSG.

At the same time the increasing incidence of civil wars led development and security specialists to begin to look at the problem of underdevelopment and insecurity from the perspective of good governance and human security. From these experiences, the conclusion followed that the security sector must be subject to the same standards of good governance as any other public service. It was on the basis of this emerging consensus that bilateral development agencies and multilateral organizations began introducing SSR into their policies, eventually making SSR a pillar of international approaches to security, development, peacebuilding and democracy promotion.

For more information on the development of SSR and good SSG, please see the further resources listed at the end of this SSR Background.



## Further resources

For broad but systematic overviews of SSR, covering reform challenges thematically, by subsector and with a focus on post-conflict contexts:

- UN SSR Taskforce  
**Security Sector Reform Integrated Technical Guidance Notes**  
(United Nations, 2012).
- OECD Development Assistance Committee  
**Section 7: Implementing SSR Sector by Sector**  
in OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform: Supporting Security and Justice (Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007, pp. 112-235).
- DCAF-ISSAT  
**SSR in a Nutshell: Manual for Introductory Training on Security Sector Reform**  
(Geneva: DCAF-ISSAT, 2012).
- DCAF-ISSAT  
**Introduction to Security Sector Reform**  
A free e-learning course available on the DCAF-ISSAT Community of Practice website: <http://issat.dcaf.ch>

For more on the importance of national/local ownership in SSR:

- UN SSR Taskforce  
**National Ownership of Security Sector Reform**  
in Security Sector Reform Integrated Technical Guidance Notes (United Nations, 2012, pp. 13–34).
- Laurie Nathan (ed)  
**No Ownership, No Commitment: A Guide to Local Ownership of Security Sector Reform**  
(Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2007).
- Tim Donais (ed)  
**Local Ownership and Security Sector Reform**  
(Munster: LIT Verlag, 2008).

For specific guidance on gender and SSR:

- UN SSR Taskforce  
**Gender-Responsive Security Sector Reform**  
in Security Sector Reform Integrated Technical Guidance Notes (United Nations, 2012, pp. 35–60).
- Megan Bastick and Kristin Valasek (eds)  
**Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit**  
(Geneva: DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN-INSTRAW, 2008).
- OECD Development Assistance Committee  
**Section 9: Integrating Gender Awareness and Equality**  
in OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform: Supporting Security and Justice (Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009).

For more on the development of the concept of security sector governance and reform:

- Heiner Hänggi  
**Security Sector Reform – Concepts and Contexts**  
in Transformation: A Security Sector Reform Reader (Pasig: INCITEGov, 2011, pp. 11–40).
- Hans Born and Albrecht Schnabel (eds)  
**Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments**  
(Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009).
- Mark Sedra (ed)  
**The Future of Security Sector Reform**  
(Waterloo: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2010).

## More DCAF SSR resources

- DCAF publishes a wide variety of tools, handbooks and guidance on all aspects of SSR and good SSG, available free-for-download at [www.dcaf.ch](http://www.dcaf.ch). Many resources are also available in languages other than English.
- The DCAF-ISSAT Community of Practice website makes available a range of online learning resources for SSR practitioners at <http://issat.dcaf.ch>

**DCAF, the Geneva Centre for Security Sector**

**Governance**, is an international foundation whose mission is to assist the international community in pursuing good governance and reform of the security sector. DCAF develops and promotes norms and standards, conducts tailored policy research, identifies good practices and recommendations to promote democratic security sector governance, and provides in-country advisory support and practical assistance programmes.

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DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance  
P. O. Box 1360  
CH-1211 Geneva 1  
Switzerland

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