

Advancing Security Governance – the increasing role of SSR in peace- and statebuilding concepts

According to the OECD, one billion US dollar was spent worldwide in 2011 on civilian security sector reform (SSR). This, however, is probably only the tip of the iceberg since the sums spent on military security activities are not included. According to the OECD, Germany was the fourth largest SSR donor with 63 million US dollar in 2011. Nevertheless, until now there has been no substantial discussion about SSR in the German public.

When it comes to SSR, there are many different perspectives and actors, ranging from the military via civilian oversight institutions to civil society. Therefore, there are also many aspects of SSR, not only the so called “Ertüchtigungsansatz” (enabling approach), where e.g. policemen are trained and educated in order to provide security. SSR can also include approaches addressing the Parliaments, the judiciary and even civil society. In order for SSR to be successful one has to look at the context of every single country. There is no general rule for SSR approaches. However, some trends are visible: In 2011, half of the one billion US dollar were spent for Afghanistan and Kosovo. In general there are only a limited number of SSR countries, others fall by the wayside. South America, for example, is almost completely ignored.

There is also a certain doubt about what has been achieved by SSR until today. A problem is that the formulated objectives and projects are usually very ambitious and large scale. Democratization of Somalia, for example, is a very bold goal that can't be reached in a short period of time. It might be necessary to formulate less ambitious goals and concentrate on smaller steps. Another problem is the balance with regard to implementing organizations: According to the OECD only 10 per cent of SSR reforms are implemented by civil society actors.

At the same time, from a practical perspective, it was underlined that SSR indeed stretches far beyond the narrow confines of security forces. However, many governments see SSR as a threat or challenge to their power base and therefore (conflict) sensitivity is key in the design and early phases of any SSR-project. The crucial question is which people need to be involved into those processes. While the government of a country usually decides whether to accept SSR reforms as part of bi- or multilateral cooperation programmes, in practice, agreements, such as e.g. ceasefire agreements, need to go through parliament and need to be implemented by the military and conflict parties on the ground. Therefore, different entry points/levels for SSR approaches exist.

Are the current trends in security governance helpful to further peacebuilding?

Normative-based approaches to SSR with a peacebuilding perspective have increased. Yet, they remain little both with regard to organizations implementing SSR programmes as well as with regard to the countries in which those projects are being pursued. Should peace and security find a prominent place within the Post-2015 development agenda, SSR will become significantly more relevant to actors from the development and peacebuilding community. Currently the field of SSR support is already seeing a new dynamic and interest from private consultancies and private military and security companies. While this is not automatically bad, it however entails the risk that more engagement in SSR support may not always result in furthering peacebuilding needs.

What are the challenges, which approaches need to be adapted?

The fact that SSR programs are by their very nature highly political is a core challenge with many dimensions. On the one hand the different relevant actors remain highly suspicious of each other: The security forces in a partner country, official governmental institutions and agencies in donor countries, civil society actors from both partner and donor countries. Any SSR approach therefore has to be designed very sensitively. Especially actors on the donor side must be aware of the domestic political risk of working together with actors from a security sector that might have been involved in human rights violations, too.

How should linkages between security governance and peacebuilding be strengthened?

First, it was argued that even if SSR support will not always be on the agenda of development and peacebuilding actors, any disconnect between SSR processes under way in a country and other peacebuilding processes might be detrimental. Furthermore, the notion of “taking a development approach to security” – which was taken up from the preceding plenary discussions – was broadly endorsed and underlined with regard to SSR. Finally, it was called for a stronger involvement of civil society organizations in SSR processes. This could positively influence the balance of SSR-processes which otherwise always tend to go too far in the direction of mere “train and equip” approaches.

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