

Putting people at the heart of security:

Reviewing approaches, exploring solutions

Meeting report

On 12 March, Saferworld organised a roundtable in Brussels titled 'Putting people at the heart of security: reviewing approaches, exploring solutions'. The meeting brought together experts from EU institutions and Member States, international organisations, think tanks and civil society to share experiences and lessons about Security Sector Reform (SSR) and the extent to which such processes have been able to improve human security. The meeting was also an opportunity to explore more innovative approaches to enhancing people's security, including community security. This briefing summarises the highlights of the discussion.

1. Human security at the heart of SSR principles

20 years ago, the introduction of the concept of human security was a way to redefine what security meant in a rapidly changing post-Cold War environment. It enabled the international community to look at security challenges from a different, non-state centric perspective, correctly highlighting that the security of the state does not always coincide with that of its people. This paradigm shift was critical to inform the development of Security Sector Reform principles outlined in the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Guidelines on SSR, which stressed that such processes should be:

- "People-centred, locally-owned and based on democratic norms and human rights principles and the rule of law, seeking to provide freedom from fear;
- Seen as a framework to structure thinking about how to address diverse security challenges facing states and their populations;
- Based on a broad assessment of the range of security needs of the people and the state.¹

These standards have been integrated into relevant EU policy frameworks, such as the Concept for European Community Support for Security Sector

Reform², which endorse the importance and centrality of human security, rule of law, human rights and governance in the EU's approach to SSR.

2. A challenging translation of principles into practice

Nevertheless, people-centred approaches have proven challenging to translate into practice. Security interventions and programmes continue to focus primarily on technical and institutional reforms at the central government level for a number of reasons:

- Security is generally considered to be a state prerogative. Therefore, attempts to incorporate a wide range of stakeholders, including non-state actors, often face resistance from central institutions or are avoided altogether.
- SSR is inherently political and involves altering mechanisms of power. Changing the way security and justice institutions operate can therefore be seen as a process creating winners and losers (or challenging a system that has established winners and losers) and can be met with opposition.
- Creating an incentive to carry out comprehensive reforms to address sensitive issues of governance may be challenging when partner governments lack (and request) training, equipment and infrastructure. Moreover, today's geopolitical challenges and security threats, such as those defined as stemming from terrorism and organised crime, are pushing donors back towards the traditional 'train and equip' model that does not necessarily look to improve underlying drivers of conflict or people's access to equitable services, and in fact can actually increase capacity for violence.
- Moving beyond the technical approach to security and justice reform – and supporting longer term, more arduous and politically complex processes in which people are encouraged to shape the

¹ <http://www.oecd.org/dac/governance-peace/conflictandfragility/docs/31785288.pdf>

² <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0253:FIN:EN:PDF>

security and justice institutions that they want and need – are difficult to reconcile with most programming cycles and procedures.

- Fostering political will, both within the donor community and partner governments, has also proven difficult because of a lack of knowledge of why and how participatory approaches to security reform should be adopted.

While it is often hoped that programmes with a technical and institutional focus will contribute to strengthened state capability and legitimacy, and thus to the stability of countries as a whole, many have struggled to make a real difference to people's lives. Indeed, recent evaluations of donors' support to SSR processes, including that of the European Commission and the UK's development assistance, found that impacts on the majority of people's security and access to justice had been limited³. This urgently needs to be corrected through more sensitive and contextual approaches.

3. The benefits of people-centred approaches to SSR processes

People-centred approaches to security can positively contribute to security and justice reform processes. First and foremost, they ensure that SSR programmes are shaped by the security concerns and needs of a broad range of actors, and that ultimately they foster positive and sustainable results for people on the ground. Moreover, they can help prevent the marginalisation of certain groups and thereby avoid the inadvertent deterioration of what are already complex situations. People-centred approaches to security can also contribute to increased legitimacy and local ownership of SSR interventions, and thus ensure that commitment to and momentum for reform is maintained. This is of particular importance for the sustainability of the process, especially during times of national political uncertainty.

Reconciling hybrid security models consisting of state and non-state or customary actors is also key to improving service accessibility and delivery. These approaches usually also enjoy greater public legitimacy. While SSR processes tend to focus on centrally-located institutions and actors, people-centred approaches support greater decision making at the local level, particularly in rural and remote areas where state outreach may be weaker. These approaches are far more meaningful and cost-effective, and can be supported through smaller grants to more nimble programmes.

The rationale in favour of people-centred approaches to security is increasingly recognised by donors and governments, and there are a number of positive

examples from which lessons can be drawn, such as the Burundi-Netherlands Security Sector Development (SSD) Programme⁴, the Swedish Support Programme to Community Policing in Albania⁵, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) programme on violence reduction and human security in Honduras⁶, and the UK's Access to Security and Justice Programme in Sierra Leone⁷.

4. How-to: Putting people at the heart of security

Nevertheless, knowledge on how people-centred approaches should be integrated into security and justice interventions is still limited. During the meeting, the following points were identified to answer the 'how' question:

- People-centred approaches should be included throughout the programming cycle: from the design, to the implementation and the monitoring and evaluation. Specifically, consultative processes should be carried out throughout programmes to ensure that both the design and the implementation reflect local concerns and needs. In addition, people-focussed indicators should be identified from the outset to support monitoring and evaluation exercises. People-centred approaches also entail engaging with stakeholders about the process itself. It is important to manage expectations, be clear about objectives and desired outcomes, and create feedback loops for regular reporting, learning and improving.
- A number of tools can assist with the adoption and mainstreaming of people-centred approaches. For instance, conflict analyses and community-based assessments are useful to identify stakeholders, security problems and barriers to improved security and justice delivery. The EU's Human Rights-Based Approach toolkits can ensure that context-specific human rights situations are assessed and that they become an integral part of the programming cycle. Moreover, adopting a theory of change approach can allow donors to explicitly unpack how they plan to improve service delivery and articulate what role citizens can play in ensuring the best possible results.
- SSR programmes shouldn't be so detailed that they do not allow for flexibility, but detailed enough that they ensure a shared understanding and commitment to the programme. Specifically,

³ For example:

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/evaluation/evaluation_reports/reports/2011/1295_vol1_en.pdf; <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ICAI-Report-UK-Development-Assistance-for-Security-and-Justice..pdf>

⁴ <http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/Putting%20governance%20at%20the%20heart%20of%20SSR.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.cp-project.al/en/> and <http://issat.dcaf.ch/Home/Community-of-Practice/SSR-in-Practice/Countries-Regions/Albania/Swedish-Support-to-Community-Policing-in-Albania>

⁶ <http://issat.dcaf.ch/Home/Community-of-Practice/SSR-in-Practice/Countries-Regions/Honduras>

⁷ <http://dai.com/our-work/projects/sierra-leone%E2%80%9494access-security-and-justice-programme>

programme structures should explicitly reflect stated objectives to ensure they receive equal attention.

- Because security-related interventions are sensitive, mainstreaming people-centred approaches also requires giving sufficient attention to attitudinal and behavioural change processes. These changes occur concurrently and differently amongst all the stakeholders, be that the community members, the partner organisations, government staff, security personnel, or donors. Adoption and support of people-centred approaches will happen at different speeds and to varying levels of commitment and thoroughness. Therefore it was suggested that cross-stakeholder sensitisation, trainings and lesson learning must be promoted to ensure normative and structural commitment to people-centred approaches to security.
- The mainstreaming of people-centred approaches requires support and encouragement to communities both individually and through civil society organisations, to engage with their security and justice providers, voice their security concerns and needs, and identify potential solutions. Setting up the appropriate initiatives and mechanisms, such as programmes to develop local NGOs and communities' capacity to engage with their authorities, is critical to allow this to happen, especially as donors and national level actors do not usually know how to go about involving the relevant civil society organisations in such processes.
- It is important to recognise that meaningful consultations, changing attitudes and behaviours, and creating trust between communities and their security providers takes time. Therefore, it is unrealistic to assume that results will be achieved quickly. Programming cycles and procedures should be more flexible and long-term to ensure they respond and can iteratively adapt to the dynamics and political nature of SSR.

5. Community security in focus

One particular approach that has proven effective in putting people at the heart of security is community security, which focusses on people's interlinked peace, security and development needs. Many community security programmes that were developed from the early 2000s found their roots in processes of small arms control and reintegration of former combatants, which required comprehensive strategies to reduce levels of violence and improve peoples' quality of life. This approach is currently being used to address a number of issues and support various initiatives, such as national level policing strategies (Kosovo – Saferworld, Papua New Guinea – UNDP), protection of livelihoods (Caucasus – Saferworld), countering violent extremisms (Kyrgyzstan – Saferworld) or youth gang violence (El Salvador – UNDP).

According to Saferworld, the main objective, and characteristic, of community security processes is building more positive relationships between communities and their authorities, and creating opportunities for these groups to identify security concerns together in order to plan collective responses. At the core of the community security approach is the idea that gradual trust-building processes enable communities to be their own agents of change and create a virtuous circle to collectively address immediate and longer term security deficits⁸.

Community security processes essentially build on local level structures and systems of governance which are fundamental to the organisation of social, political and economic life. In many contexts, the notion of 'social contract' can be broken down in different levels: for example, a social contract between individuals or families with the community they live in, and then a social contract between this community and the state. As a result, improvements in governance and security cannot only stem from a central state with an unaccountable monopoly of power and violence. Instead it hinges upon a range of stakeholders, both state and non-state, who co-exist, collaborate or compete in hybrid political orders. By connecting communities more constructively with each other, with representatives of the state and, where appropriate, with non-state security providers as well, community-based approaches to security improve state-society relationships and increase state legitimacy and accountability at both the local and national levels.

Beyond the relevance of this type of approach to respond to security challenges, the discussion raised a number of issues that will require further research and investment by practitioners in years to come:

- There are inherent risks when engaging at the local level, such as legitimising inequitable structures of power that may in fact detract from a wider statebuilding and peace building agenda. Therefore how can practitioners ensure a conflict-sensitive approach that mitigates these risks, and prevents the co-optation of community security processes?
- How can we scale up the impact of local level engagement? Initial responses from the people in the room suggested that by using community security in a more strategic way, notably by embedding it in a broader national strategy or programme, there is potential to use local analysis and experiences to inform wider national policies. In addition, there is the potential to then use community security approaches to support the local implementation of those policies.
- While community security programmes have been undertaken by a number of actors for the past two decades, there are still lessons to be

⁸ For more information on Saferworld's approach to community security, including on programming: <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/what/community-security>

learned around how the different levels of action and change interact, and how community security can address wider peacebuilding and statebuilding dynamics.

- Organisations are gradually mainstreaming gender-sensitivity in their programming to better understand the distinct security needs and concerns of men and women and to design more effective responses. However, more needs to be done to systematise and improve the application of gender lenses to community security.

Conclusion: towards a balanced approach

What lies ahead for all actors involved in security and justice is not being forced to choose between state level, technical approaches or participatory, people-focused approaches to SSR, but rather adopting both simultaneously and complementarily. It should be recognised in any SSR policy that security is not something that is merely dispensed through security sector institutions, but experienced either positively or negatively through the quality of relationships, transactions and behaviours between multiple and potentially competing sections of society – each of which have a significant bearing on conflict dynamics. Recalibrating these relationships to be fairer and more peaceful at the community level should be at the heart of SSR processes just as much as any state level interventions - because ‘security’ in its fullest sense cannot ever hope to be achieved through top down institution building or ‘train and equip’ interventions alone.

Therefore, Human Security approaches that are tightly centred on people’s perceptions and needs should guide the policy and practice of any SSR work. Everything from the 1994 Human Development Report and the OECD DAC handbook on SSR in 2008, to the draft framework on the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), upholds this.

This requires an SSR policy committed to working from the bottom up as well as top down. To this end, evidence from Saferworld’s work suggests a shift away from investments in either the state or society, and toward efforts that can help increase interactions and trust *between* them and can help achieve the dual aims of peacebuilding and state building. That balance is crucial. And this roundtable highlighted that now is the time to firmly move the conversation from ‘why’ to ‘how’.

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

We are a not-for-profit organisation with programmes in nearly 20 countries and territories across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Europe.

Saferworld – 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT, UK
 Registered Charity no 1043843
 Company limited by guarantee no 3015948
 Tel: +44 (0)20 7324 4646 | Fax: +44 (0)20 7324 4647
 Email: general@saferworld.org.uk
 Web: www.saferworld.org.uk