

Project overview

Security sector reform (SSR) has moved rapidly up the international aid agenda during the past decade. SSR is a politically-sensitive undertaking, more so than in more conventional areas of development assistance such as health and education. This is the case because control of the security sector underpins political power in most countries. Politics therefore shapes security decision-making processes and needs to be systematically accounted for in external SSR assistance programming if it is to be effective.

This comparative study on the Politics of Security Decision-Making was carried out between 2005-08. The main aims were: first, to enhance understanding about who makes decisions about security, how this occurs, and the consequences for the security of people; and second, to explore ways of incorporating this knowledge more effectively into UK SSR programming. The study focused on three countries where the UK currently supports SSR: Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Uganda.

SSR programming should be underpinned by a firm evidence base, where possible. Political analysis is often inadequate and limited to the planning stage of international SSR assistance programmes, rather than integrated throughout the programming cycle. As a consequence, external assistance is not sufficiently tailored to the needs, priorities and circumstances facing partner countries, or flexible enough to respond to changes in the political environment.

There are various factors which make it difficult for SSR policy and programme managers to acquire the political analysis they require: the long-term nature of academic research; the sensitive nature of security issues which makes research difficult; limited capacity within the advisory cadre to conduct analysis or to digest research produced by others; lack of 'local knowledge' about the contexts where the external actors are working; and the political imperative to develop programmes before there is adequate understanding of this context.

As a consequence, the UK Government like other donor countries relies heavily on outside sources of analysis to inform programming. In most cases, these are UK-based academic institutions or international consultants from outside the countries where SSR programmes are being established. This makes it difficult to acquire the inside political knowledge required or to involve local analysts in UK programming processes.

The methodology adopted for this study sought to overcome some of these problems by partnering with local institutions in Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Uganda. The aim of a 'partnership-based' approach was not simply to gain a richer analysis of security issues, but to get local researchers more involved in the UK SSR programming cycle, from the stage of agenda-setting through the development, implementation and evaluation stages.

The project proposed an iterative means of conducting research and developing SSR programming. It was a collaborative effort between CSDG and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) in Nigeria, the Social Scientists' Association (SSA) in Sri Lanka, and the Centre for Basic Research (CBR), in Uganda. The research teams interacted closely with the UK Government Conflict advisors in each country as well as DFID's SSR adviser in the implementation of the study.

For further information on how the study was carried out, the key findings, and the policy implications, see:

Country studies

- [Nigeria](#)
- [Sri Lanka](#)

- [Uganda](#)

Policy papers

- [Synthesis of Findings and Implications for UK SSR Policy](#)
- [Review of Methodology and Lessons for Future Research](#)
- [HMG SSR Policy Briefing](#) (including country policy briefs on Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Uganda)

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