

Security Sector Reform, Statebuilding and Local Ownership: Securing the State or its People?

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Abstract

It is widely acknowledged that while local ownership is one of the core principles of successful Security Sector Reform (SSR) programmes, the concept is narrowly interpreted in terms of who owns what. Moreover, the focus of SSR is often on building state institutions, rather than building the relationship between people and the state, which further limits the extent to which people, particularly at the community level, are engaged in SSR processes. It is argued that without ensuring meaningful and inclusive local ownership of SSR programmes, public trust and confidence in state security and justice sector institutions will be limited. Crucially, this will leave the state vulnerable to renewed outbreaks of conflict. To rectify this it is proposed that a hybrid SSR approach be promoted by incorporating community safety structures into SSR programmes.

Keywords

Security Sector Reform (SSR); local ownership; statebuilding; peacebuilding; community safety structures

Introduction

There is broad agreement that local ownership is one of the core principles that Security Sector Reform (SSR) programmes should adhere to, if the outcomes are to be locally accepted and responsive to local needs and, thus, sustainable (Baker 2010; Caparini 2010; Donais 2008, 2009; Mobekk 2010; Nathan 2007; OECD 2007; Oosterveld and Galand 2012; Sedra 2010a; UN 2008). However, there remains a gap between policy and practice. Moreover, as this article will discuss, the term ‘local ownership’ is often narrowly interpreted, both in terms of who the locals are and what ownership constitutes, despite policy advice to the contrary (UN 2008).

The article underscores the importance of ensuring that civil society and the broader public constitute the ‘local’ that should ‘own’ SSR processes. Efforts focussing on building state institutions and structures, without sufficient attention being paid to developing relations between the state and its people, will not, it is argued, benefit peacebuilding efforts in the long term. In the context of SSR, the article will also analyse possible tension between statebuilding in post-conflict environments and more inclusive approaches to building security and justice. It is held that building state institutions, particularly in the security and justice sector, is instrumental to building state resilience and, thus, to the peacebuilding process. However, it is maintained that without ensuring substantive and inclusive local ownership of SSR programmes, security and justice sector institutions will not be accountable or responsive to the needs of the people and will, therefore, lack public trust and confidence. This would leave the state vulnerable to renewed outbreaks of conflict. It will be suggested that public trust and confidence in state security and justice sector institutions, and

ultimately, the state itself, can be promoted in many ways, including through incorporating community safety structures into the framework of SSR programmes.

Focussing upon SSR programmes in post-conflict environments, this article engages with literature concerning local ownership and community engagement in SSR and broader peacebuilding efforts. In order to dig further into the apparent gap between policy and practice, the article also draws from the author's experience in building security and justice in post-conflict environments, while working with the UN and other international organisations in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Nepal. The article is also informed by the author's more recent engagement in evaluating community safety structures and analysing public perceptions of security and security providers, particularly while working for Saferworld.

Local Ownership and Security Sector Reform

Security Sector Reform (SSR) is an increasingly significant feature of peacebuilding and recovery efforts in places recovering from conflict (Sedra 2010b; UN 2013, 2008). This is not least because it is widely agreed that security is a prerequisite of sustainable peace, development and human rights protection (OECD 2007, 2009; UN 2008). There are a number of principles inherent to SSR, not least of which is local ownership, which is widely regarded as the bedrock and main precondition for successful SSR (Baker 2010; Caparini 2010; Donais 2008, 2009; Mobekk 2010; Nathan 2007; OECD 2007; Oosterveld and Galand 2012; Sedra 2010a; UN 2008). If SSR programmes are not locally owned, it is likely that security sector institutions, processes and policy will be less able to respond to local needs. If they do not respond to local needs, efforts to increase security and the rule of law will be compromised, public trust and confidence in the state and its security institutions will be limited (see, for example, Jaye 2006; UN 2013; Gordon, Sharma, Forbes and Cave 2011), and institutions and other outputs may be rejected (see Smith-Höhn 2010, for example). This occurred with the formal court system in Timor-Leste (Oosterveld and Galand 2012; Stromseth, Wippman and Brooke 2006) and the National Security Strategy in Kosovo (Blease and Qehaja 2013), for example. An approach that limits the engagement of local actors can also result in their 'resentment, resistance and inertia' (Nathan 2007, 3). This is likely to further challenge the peacebuilding process, and can lead to increased dependency on external assistance and increased spoiler activity (Narten 2009). The result of which can be a vicious circle in which external actors become increasingly resistant to promoting local ownership due to increased dependency and spoiler activity or, rather, perceptions about capacity and legitimacy.

However, while local ownership is part of the 'contemporary commonsense' of SSR (Donais 2009, 119), it remains unclear specifically who the locals are (Mobekk 2010; Scheye and Peake 2005; Donais 2009; Krogstad, 2013) and what constitutes ownership (Mobekk 2010; Martin and Wilson 2008). Nonetheless, it is generally considered that local ownership should entail a 'nationally led and inclusive process in which national and local authorities, parliaments and civil society, including traditional leaders, women's groups and others, are

actively engaged' (UN 2008, 11) and are able to inform decision-making throughout the SSR process. However, it is widely recognised that there is a significant gap between policy and practice (Donais 2009; Mobekk 2010; Nathan 2007; Oosterveld and Galand 2012; Scheye 2008; Sedra 2010b), with external actors often imposing 'their models and programmes on local actors' (Nathan 2007, 7).

There are many reasons for this, including perceived and actual limitations in terms of institutional and human capacity, including lack of expertise, or lack of credibility or authority on the part of governments in post-conflict environments (see DCAF 2009; Sedra 2010a). It is also to be expected that where SSR programmes are externally funded and developed, there will be an inclination for external actors to promote their own models (Hänggi 2009; Nathan 2007). There are also time and cost constraints. This is particularly due to donor funding cycles, which demand outputs within short timeframes (Nathan 2007; OECD 2009; Oosterveld and Galand 2012). These constraints lend themselves to utilising other models, rather than creating models borne of the specifics of the context after widespread consultation and compromise, which take time, money and considerable effort (DCAF 2009; Heupel 2012).

Local actors may also lack the political will to engage in or support reform efforts. This is particularly the case with SSR, which can substantially limit the power of elites in society (see Berg 2012; Gordon 2011; Heupel 2012). Local actors may also not accept some of the fundamental principles of SSR, outside local ownership, such as the need for security structures to be affordable, responsive to the needs of the people, and representative of them. It can take time to build awareness of some of the principles inherent to SSR, outside local ownership, which often delays or limits the level of local engagement in SSR programmes.

It is argued, however, that while effective interventions and sustainable peace may not be predicated upon immediate and full local ownership, the risks of delaying full ownership by local actors need to be attended to (Donais 2009; Narten 2009). It is also important to accept that the West does not have exclusive understanding of how to build peace (see Cubitt 2013; Lidén, Mac Ginty and Richmond 2009). So, while issues such as affordability, accountability and the equal treatment of all people by security sector institutions may be instrumental to the development of a democratic security sector, issues that are of less strategic importance should not delay the transfer of decision-making authority to local actors.

Inclusive and Meaningful Local Ownership

It is also important not to limit the level of local ownership that is promoted by external actors in terms of the type of activities local actors are engaged in, the point at which local actors become involved, and the type of local actors engaged. Too often local ownership is reduced to consultation, engagement after key decisions have been made, and involvement of only a few like-minded, state-level members of the security and political elite who accept the decisions reached previously by external actors (Baker 2010; Benedix and Stanley 2008; Caparini 2010; Heupel 2012; Krogstad 2013; Mobekk 2010; Sedra 2010a). This is despite a

widespread understanding that SSR processes should be inclusive if they are to be effective (UN 2008; OECD 2007).

The engagement of civil society representatives tends to be limited and sporadic, often little more than initial consultation and infrequent dialogue (Caparini 2010), as was seen in Kosovo, Timor-Leste, Iraq and Somalia, for example (Jackson 2011, 2010; Saferworld and Forum for Civic Initiatives 2007). Recognising ‘locals’ do not constitute a homogenous whole who share security interests and concerns (Ebo 2007; Mobekk 2010; UN 2008) demands engaging a wide cross-section of society in SSR processes, which is costly and time-consuming and can hinder efforts to reach consensus and co-ordinate. There can also be the assumption that only ‘experts’, such as security sector professionals, have the requisite knowledge to engage in discussions about the security sector. In contrast, non-state actors are widely considered to be only ‘marginally relevant to the core concerns of SSR’ (Donais 2009, 123). It should be considered that experts may not be those in the business of peacebuilding (nor those with a vested interest in securing their positions of power), but those who have suffered the effects of conflict and insecurity (have contextual knowledge), and whose commitment to the peace process will determine whether it will be sustainable (see Darby 2009). Moreover, it is often considered that wider engagement of the general public will not only jeopardise efforts to create a professional security sector, because the general public lacks the requisite knowledge to reach sensible decisions, but can also compromise operational security. As Donais has said, ‘labelling an issue as a “national security concern” has long served as a convenient excuse for keeping it out of the public domain’ (Donais 2008, 284).

However, limiting the engagement in SSR decisions to external actors and amenable, local security and political elites can have serious consequences for the capability, responsiveness, legitimacy and accountability of security sector institutions, and undermines the principle of democratic governance that underpins SSR (Caparini 2010). Exclusive focus on political elites and state-level authorities can undermine the extent to which SSR processes are broadly locally owned (assuming power is rarely willingly relinquished). It can, thus, hinder improvement of security and justice at the community level, public support and confidence in state security institutions and, consequently, whether or not SSR programmes and broader peacebuilding efforts are ultimately successful (Cubitt 2013; Donais 2009; Hendrickson 2010; Oosterveld and Galand 2012; Samuels 2010; Scheye 2008). This is particularly the case in places where SSR programmes are being implemented, where governments may not be broadly representative of the people they represent (Martin and Wilson 2008). Prioritising local ownership at the level of the state can disadvantage people at the community level, particularly the vulnerable and marginalised. State-level actors may, for instance, support SSR programmes ‘not out of a commitment to improved security governance, but rather as a means of enhancing their capacity to suppress dissent or to undermine political opponents’ (Donais 2009, 120-121).

Having a broad scope of who might constitute local owners can also help identify more committed and more effective drivers of the reform process. This is particularly the case in post-conflict environments where political elites or authorities may be discredited or lack

genuine commitment to promote reform and governance of the security sector, not least because SSR can limit the power of elites in society (see Donais 2009; Heupel 2012; Krogstad 2013; Narten 2009; Oosterveld and Galand 2012, for instance). Broadening the scope of who is actively engaged in SSR to civil society and those at the community level can also help alleviate concerns regarding the threat of spoilers. Spoilers that threaten a fragile peace are less likely to be successful where people feel that they are involved in decisions about their future and where civil society is robust. Where there is dialogue, there is likely to be less frustration and less alienation and, consequently, less potential for spoilers to exploit (see Narten 2009).

Empowering civil society to potentially challenge the state and its institutions is not destabilising, despite fears to the contrary: as Cubitt maintains, it can constitute a 'counterbalance to government excess [which] is a central tenet of democracy, and democracy is considered fundamental for the sustainability of peaceful societies' (Cubitt 2013, 91). It may be more difficult to co-ordinate and reach consensus if the number and range of actors engaged in SSR is significantly increased, not least because locals are not homogenous and may not share the same security concerns and needs (Donais 2009). Nonetheless, building democratic institutions is exactly about constructing systems and processes that enable disparate, and sometimes conflicting, voices to be heard rather than side-lining or silencing them (see Cubitt 2013; Nathan 2007). It is precisely because society is heterogeneous that the voices of different societal groups need to be heard in any peacebuilding process if it is to be successful. Ignoring disparate voices in SSR programmes does not decrease the complexity of SSR and chances of failure; it merely disguises the complexity and fails to address aspects that might otherwise lead to success. The success of SSR depends upon recognising the complexity of the reform process and ensuring there are mechanisms in place that enable the voices of different actors across society to inform the process (see Benedix and Stanley 2008; Nathan 2007). Compromising sustainability and the democratic process in favour of quick-wins is therefore either short-sighted or imperialistically motivated, and likely to paradoxically prolong the presence of external actors (see Cubitt 2013; Narten 2009; Nathan 2007).

As well as having a broad understanding of who the locals are and what they should own, it is equally important not to limit the timeframe within which 'locals' 'own'. It is important to engage civil society and representatives at the community level throughout the SSR process. Security needs and concerns will change over time and the impact of various decisions at various points in the design and implementation stages can have an instrumental and long-lasting impact upon the future security of communities and individuals within those communities. The nature of the involvement will, to an extent, depend upon the nature of the stakeholder and, of course, the specific context (see Mobekk 2010). However, the needs and concerns of all stakeholders should be considered in the process and inform reform decisions, with the result that SSR outcomes can be said to be broadly owned by local actors across society (see Narten 2009).

Engaging more people for longer durations in SSR processes increases the time as well as complexity and cost of SSR programmes. However, SSR should be approached as a long-

term endeavour, prioritising inclusive and bottom-up approaches to building peace and security and acknowledging that the process of SSR is instrumental to its outcome and sustainability (see Keane and Downes 2012; Nathan 2007; Sedra 2010a). Indeed, if SSR is to be effective it is argued that the way in which it is done (the process), including the extent to which local actors across society drive the process, should be considered as important as the structures that are built (Nathan 2007; Panarelli 2010). This is the case no matter how much longer the process takes and irrespective of whether decisions reached aren't fully favoured by the donor agency or wider international community: for results, if unsustainable, are irrelevant (Nathan 2007; OECD 2009).

Statebuilding, SSR and Resilience

In order to operationalise substantive, inclusive local ownership of SSR programmes, it is argued that a bottom-up approach to SSR be implemented alongside the largely top-down, state-centric approach that has dominated SSR to date (Baker and Scheye 2007; Caparini 2010; Jackson 2011). The security sector is often perceived as representing 'the defining element of modern statehood' (Benedix and Stanley 2008, 97) and SSR is often central to statebuilding efforts, as has been seen in Afghanistan, Iraq and Sierra Leone, for instance (Jackson 2011). However, as with statebuilding, the focus of SSR is often on building state institutions with less regard for building relationships between the people and the state (Andersen 2012; Donais and Knorr 2013; Jackson 2010, 2011). In Iraq, for instance, the US helped construct state institutions that were alien to the local population and at odds with the political, cultural and historical context, contributing little to the development of an organic relationship between the state and its people, and little public support for the state (Jackson 2010). The time and cost constraints inherent to many SSR programmes, as mentioned earlier, can also lend themselves to an almost exclusive focus on technical assistance, and training and equipping security institutions, and so by-pass efforts to ensure comprehensive local engagement and ownership.

Particularly post 9/11, weak states are regarded as potentially greater threats to international peace and security than more powerful states. To counter some of these threats, much effort has been focussed on building the capacity of post-conflict states in an effort to build state resilience in the face of potential armed conflict and other risks (Duffield 2007; Patrick 2011). This has coincided with increased suspicion of non-state groups, which, combined with other factors such as perceived weakness of civil society in conflict-affected and conflict-vulnerable states, reinforces state-centric, top-down approaches to SSR (Caparini 2010). This could be seen, for example, with the marginalisation of civil society in SSR processes in Afghanistan, which came across as international community disregard for the security concerns and needs of Afghan citizens. This, in turn, undermined the legitimacy and public support for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and contributed to its failure to control the growing insurgency (Caparini 2010). As has been referred to earlier, occasional consultation, information delivery and limited engagement in oversight of SSR

outcomes (rather than the process itself) at best tend to characterise the involvement of people at the community level in SSR.

The focus, therefore, is on the state, its institutions and leaders and less on people, the community or the relationship between the state and its people. However, as Jackson (2010) emphasises, the state requires legitimacy and, in order to gain it, public support. In order to solicit that support, civil society and the wider public must be involved in the statebuilding project for it to be meaningful and to resonate with cultural values. As Kostovicova suggests in respect of governance, statebuilding is more than just a technocratic exercise; it is about building relationships between the governed and the governors and, as such, 'it relies on the governed having a stake in the process by having a 'say' in it' (Kostovicova 2008, 643). As the primary conceptual framework in which we understand the relationship between the state and the citizen, Knight (2009) argues that SSR should incorporate a social contract perspective, through which citizens are seen to bestow legitimacy upon the state. This would shift the focus of attention from state structures (as well as formal civil society and community-level structures) to the relationship between the state and its citizens, and, thus, more likely result in successful SSR and broader statebuilding.

The focus of SSR, however, remains on building or reforming state security and justice sector institutions. Building state institutions is instrumental to building state resilience and, thus, to the peacebuilding process. However, without ensuring substantive and inclusive local ownership of SSR programmes, security and justice sector institutions will not be accountable or responsive to the needs of the people and will, therefore, lack public trust and confidence. This would leave the state vulnerable to renewed outbreaks of conflict. Where SSR programmes are imposed by external actors or driven by the self-interest of elite groups, they are likely to have little resonance with the everyday experience of people at the community level (see de Coning 2013; OECD 2005; Scheye 2008). As Samuels has argued, the focus on building predominantly Western-inspired institutions and structures 'has largely resulted in shell-like institutions, un-enforced and poorly understood legislation, and judges and police with little commitment to the rights and values sought to be entrenched through the reform' (Samuels 2006, 18). In short, SSR programmes that are not informed by the needs and concerns of people across society, weaken state resilience and encourage dependency, instability and insecurity (see de Coning 2013; Jackson 2012; Narten 2009), as has been seen in Afghanistan (Caparini 2010), Kosovo (Jackson 2012) and Liberia (Podder 2013), for instance.

Darby (2009) recommends privileging the everyday as an alternative to, what he considers to be, the colonialising impulse of peacebuilding, and argues that listening to those who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised in peacebuilding endeavours can help secure a lasting peace:

In many situations, whether a peace can be made or maintained may depend more on these grounded, personalized understandings – experiential knowledge – than on the geopolitical calculations and theoretical postulates of those skilled in state-building and diplomatic negotiation (Darby 2009, 712).

To reiterate, there can be serious consequences for the legitimacy and success of SSR and wider peacebuilding processes without actively and meaningfully engaging people at the community level. As Cubitt (2013) argues, this is particularly because those outside communities (and states) that have suffered conflict are likely to be less able to identify peace and security in those places, especially how they are interpreted by people living there.

It is argued, therefore, that top-down approaches to building security and justice need to be complemented by attention paid to how security and justice are experienced and understood at the community-level. Such an approach would, as Scheye (2008) suggests, help to avoid prejudicing SSR outcomes and pre-determining who the local owners should be. Empowering and engaging civil society and those at the community-level can also accelerate the reform process, particularly where there is a lack of will among the political and security elites to engage in reform, and ultimately promote broad-based security and justice (see Berg 2012). A hybrid SSR approach, which incorporates top-down and bottom-up approaches to building security and justice after conflict, would tick ‘many of the boxes of “local ownership”, “participation” and “sustainability” that external statebuilders crave’ (Mac Ginty 2011, 1). It would also ‘bring back the local voices which are supposed to be a part of the social contract upon which the liberal state is built’ (Richmond 2009, 333) without which the state is not legitimate. It would also resonate with the fact that peace and security are not made (or unmade) by a narrow set of actors: they are made and constantly remade by people across society (MacGinty 2011; Richmond 2009).

Incorporating Community Safety Structures into SSR Programmes

It is suggested that community-level engagement and, thus, public trust and confidence in state security and justice sector institutions, and ultimately, the state itself, can be promoted in many ways, including through incorporating community safety structures into the framework of SSR programmes. Such structures could constitute the mechanisms that Benedix and Stanley (2008) suggest are required in order to ensure the multiplicity of security concerns and needs inform the reform process.

Structures or mechanisms at the community level which exist to exchange information about security, address community-level safety and security concerns, and build relationships between communities, police and local government officials, for instance, exist in many countries (Bastick and Whitman 2013; van Tongeren 2013). They can also be referred to as community safety councils, local security forums, district or provincial security committees, citizen security councils, police liaison boards, police community relations committees, and community policing forums (Bastick and Whitman 2013; Saferworld 2014; Stabilisation Unit 2014). Examples of promoting direct engagement in security-related matters at the community level in environments affected by armed conflict can be found with the community safety (now referred to as community security) approach developed in the Balkans by the international NGO Saferworld and its partners the Balkan Youth Institute (BUY), the Centre for Security Studies – Bosnia-Herzegovina (CSS), CIVIL and the Forum

for Civic Initiatives (FIQ) (Sokolová and Smith 2006). Now referred to as community security, Saferworld's approach has since expanded to other conflict-affected environments including South Sudan, Kenya and Nepal (Donnelly, Nikolla, Poudel and Chakraborty 2013). Other examples include local security committees established in Haiti by women's community support organisations (Bastick and Whitman 2013), Local Security Councils in Columbia and Guatemala (Barnes and Albrecht 2008), provincial and district-level security committees in Sierra Leone (Kunz and Valasek 2012), and security and justice sub-committees in several District Community Councils in Afghanistan (Stabilisation Unit 2014).

In Kosovo, Municipal Community Safety Councils (MCSCs), and the Local Public Safety Councils (LPSCs) and Community Safety Action Teams (CSATs) which feed into the MCSCs, are forums in which representatives of local administrations, the police and communities meet regularly to discuss security needs and concerns and propose solutions. These structures have increased trust and confidence between members of the public and local police and administrative authorities; enhanced co-operation between local, municipal and central-level authorities; helped increase transparency and accountability of state institutions; empowered people at the local level; and also brought communities together and, thus, helped contribute to reconciliation and peacebuilding (Gordon 2010). Ultimately the strengths of community safety approaches lie in the potential to create more effective, efficient, transparent, accountable, inclusive and responsive security institutions and administrative authorities; enable people to influence the decisions that affect their lives and engage in the process of improving their own safety and security; and improve the safety and security of those most at risk who may otherwise be overlooked (Gordon 2010; Saferworld 2014).

While there are examples of community safety structures that engage local communities in decisions about their own security, frequently these structures are not integrated into SSR processes. Notable exceptions include the establishment of district and provincial security committees in Sierra Leone, which facilitated consultation and participation at the community-level with reform processes (Conteh 2007). Also of note is Saferworld's community safety approach and principles, which have informed national security policy, strategies and reform programmes in conflict-affected places such as Kosovo and Nepal (Saferworld 2014). Saferworld's work in supporting the development of community safety structures, and otherwise engaging those at the community level in decisions about their security, has also influenced reform processes and contributed to other peacebuilding processes. For instance, much of their work in Kosovo and Nepal has been to establish dialogue between the community-level and central government structures, particularly in order that state security policy is informed by the concerns of people (see Donnelly, Nikolla, Poudel and Chakraborty 2013). In Kenya, Saferworld's work on engaging communities in decisions about security was instrumental to the development of community-based policing and broader police reform. This work began to result in some improvements in relations between the police and communities and increased public trust and confidence in the police (Saferworld 2008). More recently, Saferworld received a Bond International Development Award for its work in Kenya in bringing together communities, local authorities and security

providers in order to help build trust, diffuse tension, and identify potential hotspots (Jackson, 2014), which ‘helped maintain peace and save lives during the 2013 elections in Kenya’ (Bond 2014, n.p.).

In South Sudan, Saferworld’s work includes supporting Police Community Relations Committees in Warrap and Western Bahr el Ghazal States with local partners the Kuac Area Development Agency (KUADA) and The Organisation for Children Harmony (TOCH). In these committees, the police and community representatives meet on a monthly basis to raise security concerns, build mutual trust and understanding and, as a result, enhance the security of communities. In addition, these committees have helped promote and inform the national police reform process (Saferworld 2013).

These examples highlight the impact that a community safety approach can have on efforts to reform the security sector and enhance security after conflict. However, there are few examples where community safety approaches have been formally or directly integrated into SSR processes. Similarly, while there may be other examples of external donors supporting the empowerment of civil society to be able to articulate views about their security concerns (Martin and Wilson 2008), these efforts are infrequently integrated into SSR processes. Moreover, these initiatives do not tend to be prioritised by either the host governments or donor agencies, which often regard security issues as a matter for discussion by state-level security experts and elites. As mentioned, efforts to solicit views on security from people at the community level tend to be infrequent, piecemeal and sporadic. Moreover, they are rarely developed into the type of structures and processes which can put people at the community level at the heart of SSR, ensuring they can be actively engaged in SSR processes and inform decisions about their own security (see Nathan 2007). For reasons such as additional time, cost and effort it takes to engage those at the community level in SSR processes, and for reasons of retaining control and, ultimately, power, SSR processes are rarely inclusive of those whose security is ostensibly being addressed.

It is argued that where community safety structures or similar do not exist in post-conflict environments – or exist in embryonic or piecemeal form – their development and engagement in SSR processes should be supported (see Saferworld 2014). It is also argued that such community safety structures should be incorporated into SSR programmes from the SSR inception and design stages, in order that decisions about security structures, mandates and policies are informed by the security needs of people at the community level. In Kosovo, efforts to establish such structures began after the SSR process began, partly in recognition of the limited local ownership and engagement of people at the community level (see ISSR 2006; KCSS 2010). Even after the gradual establishment of these mechanisms, their capacity remained limited and decisions about the development of the broader security sector remained internationally led, often with little regard for the local context and needs (Blease and Qehaja 2013). More recently, as noted above, the work of Saferworld, FIQ and others has helped promote dialogue between community-level and state-level security and administrative structures (see Donnelly, Nikolla, Poudel and Chakraborty 2013).

Parallels can be drawn between community safety structures and local peace committees (LPCs) and the value the latter can have in peacebuilding efforts, particularly if they are tied into so-called infrastructures for peace (see van Tongeren 2013). LPCs are structures or initiatives that exist in different forms in a number of countries, such as Sudan and Afghanistan, at the sub-state level (village or district, for instance). Their aim is to facilitate an inclusive peacebuilding process and they can be (and sometimes are) integrated into broader, national peacebuilding efforts or, rather, infrastructures for peace (see Odendaal and Olivier 2008; van Tongeren 2013). It must be emphasised, however, that attention should be paid towards the specificities of each context (structures that exist at the community level in one country, for example, may not be suitable for another) and power relations between external actors supporting community safety structures and those at the community level (and how this can skew the focus and nature of such structures and, ultimately, their value and success). It is also important not to focus only on building, refining or supporting structures and processes, but ultimately on the aim of such structures and processes: enhanced security and stability.

When new institutions and processes are being built, there can be a tendency to focus on the outputs rather than outcomes, and judge success on whether these new institutions and processes have been established rather than whether people's security has improved – as with broader SSR processes. For example, in Kosovo at a roundtable on community safety initiatives hosted by Saferworld in 2010, there were lengthy discussions about structural, procedural, legislative and administrative progress. This was until participants were reminded by a school principal that the focus of discussion should be on the security concerns of the people in Kosovo, giving the example of serious road safety concerns near his school. These concerns, he said, had remained unaddressed despite efforts over the previous four years to address the dangers from traffic to children walking to and from school, which had resulted in serious injuries (Gordon 2010).

By incorporating community safety structures into SSR processes from inception, rather than once key decisions have been made, the security concerns of people at the community level can inform a national security review, which ideally forms the basis for the subsequent development of national security policies and strategies and the bedrock of an SSR programme (see UN 2012). After informing the design and implementation of SSR programmes, the community safety structures can continue to provide a forum through which the security concerns and needs of individual citizens can be voiced and can be heard by authorities at the community and central levels. In particular, such structures should inform reviews of subsequent national security policies or strategies (see DCAF 2005; UN 2012). This not only helps to create a security sector potentially more responsive to the needs of the people, but can enhance the relationship between the state and its people. Moreover, an empowered citizenry and one which has confidence in the state and its institutions can help strengthen state resilience and, thus, prospects of a sustainable peace.

A top-down, state-centric approach to SSR is less likely to be able to capture community-level security concerns and needs, which can undermine the prospective success of SSR programmes and the wider peacebuilding process. For example, the inclusive national

consultation that preceded the 1997 Defence Review in South Africa as part of the national defence reform process, highlighted concerns that had been hitherto ignored. These concerns included ‘the plight of dispossessed communities whose land had been seized for military usage, the environmental impact of military activities and sexual harassment perpetrated by military personnel’ (Kunz and Valasek 2012, 132).

As with the type of comprehensive public surveys or community-based needs assessments conducted by Saferworld, International Alert, UNDP and various civil society organisations (Kunz and Valasek 2012), community safety structures can also feed into SSR processes public perceptions of security and justice sector institutions. Crucially, community safety structures can also potentially help improve those perceptions as well as the relationships between communities and security providers. As described by Donnelly, Nikolla, Poudel and Chakraborty (2013), supporting community safety initiatives can be particularly effective at building the social contract. People experience security and their relationship with the state at the local level. In a direct way too, community safety initiatives connect individuals with representative of the state, including administrative authorities and security providers, which provides opportunities to improve understanding and relationships between the state and its citizens and, thus, enhance state legitimacy. It bears a mention that formally capturing community security concerns can also inhibit the extent to which dominant groups determine security concerns on the basis of their own political agendas – in order to justify the need to enhance formal security capabilities, for example, or maintain the useful spectre of an external threat and, in so doing, distract attention away from more pressing domestic concerns.

The way in which reform of the security sector is approached will determine the extent to which various insecurities are made visible and are, thus, able to be addressed. For example, the provision of streetlights in certain areas can increase the security of women and other vulnerable groups: awareness of which is unlikely to be generated by top-down approaches to SSR (Donais 2008; Nathan 2008). There is, therefore, a need for mechanisms or processes to be in place to ensure community-based security perceptions and concerns, particularly those among the more vulnerable member of society, are captured. Community safety structures can identify these perceptions and concerns and facilitate a process of meaningful engagement in SSR. This can help build hope in the future and commitment to the broader peace process. Additionally, they can help develop consensus about security issues as well as contribute to reconciliation, particularly where common security concerns and interests are identified. They can, thus, contribute to peacebuilding at the community level and beyond. They can also help build relationships between groups and between the state and its people, and potentially lead to increased co-ordination between municipal and state-level authorities and between relevant line Ministries (including ministries responsible for public safety, defence, health, employment and education).

Challenges and Limitations in Incorporating Community Safety Initiatives

Incorporating community safety structures into SSR programmes should be done without adversely impacting or influencing the potential for community-based solutions to community-articulated needs. Institutionalising community-based approaches to addressing community safety and security concerns carries the potential risk of compromising the essence and value of such approaches. Serious consideration needs to be given to the powers and responsibilities of community safety structures and, more importantly, who they report to. Otherwise, institutionalising community safety structures risks securitising what are often socio-economic concerns, subjugating a wide range of concerns articulated at the community level under a security blanket, and legitimising new forms of control. It also risks usurping the power of community-based, bottom-up approaches and to merely serve to add legitimacy to state-centric and top-down processes (Gordon 2010) or promote ‘externally-generated agendas’ (Donais 2008, 285). As Donais and Knorr (2013, 66, citing Campbell 2011) have warned, with regard to engaging domestic actors at all levels in the peacebuilding process, ‘given the power differentials involved, vertical integration may easily result in the co-optation of the bottom by the top, thus draining the former of its critical edge and transformational potential’. In other words, while security concerns articulated at the community level should be able to inform SSR as well as state-level policy, care should be taken to ensure that information received from community-level structures is not misrepresented or misused in order to justify further state control, for instance.

There is also a risk that donor support of community-based groups in SSR processes could undermine rather than strengthen local ownership, given significant resource imbalances that often exist between these two, unless care is taken not to impose assumptions about risk and security (see Donais 2008). In supporting such structures and integrating them more formally into SSR processes, external values and concepts of security beyond those which promote the protection of the rights of all groups, not least excluded and marginalised groups, should not be overemphasised.

It also needs to be borne in mind that community safety structures often reflect and reinforce societal power relations, and exclude or marginalise those groups that may be more vulnerable to security threats or injustices (see Gordon, Sharma, Forbes and Cave 2011; Jackson 2011, 2010; KCSS 2010). Indeed, as Jackson (2011, 2012) has argued, community-based structures are not necessarily more legitimate, accountable or inclusive and political hybridity can reinforce domination and exclusion. Just because these bodies are at the community level does not necessarily mean that they are more representative of the wider public. Therefore, for instance, women and other vulnerable groups may not be represented or their concerns may not be voiced or heard. For instance in Kosovo, women were underrepresented in the community safety structures, particularly the MCSCs, as were other marginalised and minority groups (Gordon 2010). Similarly, certain security risks that tend to disproportionately affect women and children, such as domestic violence and trafficking, were rarely articulated as concerns within community safety structures, despite their assumed prevalence (Gordon 2010). When they were, they were often ignored or provoked harsh criticism of those who had raised them (Gordon 2010). For example, a male member of an

MCSC in Kosovo shouted ‘how dare you come here and tell me I can’t beat my wife’ to international representatives (fieldwork 2010). Fear of reactions or repercussions, or a belief that certain risks are ‘normal’ or cannot be addressed, also meant that issues such as domestic violence, organised crime, corruption or the illicit possession of small arms were rarely raised. There are various cultural values, expectations and fears which determine which security concerns might be voiced in these forums. These limitations need to be considered in order to ensure that the security needs and concerns of the most vulnerable are attended to, not least because women and other vulnerable groups are often marginalised in SSR processes (see Salahub and Nerland 2010).

There are other limitations and challenges in integrating community safety structures and other community-based structures into SSR processes, in addition to the risks posed by ignoring the inherent complexity of power relations. For instance, establishing or supporting community safety initiatives across many communities in many places recovering from conflict would be very resource intensive (see Donais and Knorr 2013; Donnelly, Nikolla, Poudel and Chakraborty 2013). There can also often be practical, security and cultural challenges for international organisations to engage with actors at the community level, particularly in the initial stages (Donnelly, Nikolla, Poudel and Chakraborty 2013; Lawrence 2012). This is why Saferworld, for instance, often relies on local civil society organisations to facilitate the development of positive working relationships between international and local actors (Donnelly, Nikolla, Poudel and Chakraborty 2013). Another potential limitation or challenge is that people at the community level may be unwilling to engage in a process that is seen to be led by external or state-level actors, or involves authorities and security providers at the community level. Moreover, it can be dangerous for people to engage in security matters, particularly in conflict-affected environments, which could discourage people from engaging or put them at risk. Also, such an approach could raise expectations within communities about the nature and results of the reform process which might not, at least not in the short-term, be met (see Donnelly, Nikolla, Poudel and Chakraborty 2013). However, it is suggested that expectation management is much more likely if there are open channels of communication.

Co-ordination would also become potentially more problematic with the engagement of community-based structures and the articulation of varied and potentially-competing security concerns and priorities. Giving voice to many different concerns also raises ‘the crucial question of “whose reality counts?”’ (Kunz and Valasek 2012, 132) and how consensus can be achieved. However, there is a need to incorporate the heterogeneity of society into SSR processes if SSR outcomes are to be relevant and responsive to the needs of different groups within society. Additionally, community-based structures can be viewed as an aid to give voice to those security concerns that might otherwise remain unheard and as a mechanism to negotiate shared security understandings and priorities. Slowing the SSR process (Scheye and Peake 2005) or taking steps to prepare for the advent of SSR during stabilisation (Downes and Muggah 2010) can also help manage the potential complexity of integrating community-based structures into SSR processes, and facilitate the development of more legitimate and sustainable outputs. Similarly, the OECD (2007) advocates the establishment of an inception

phase during which local and international capacity and knowledge can be developed, and relationships formed.

Nonetheless, as Lawrence (2012) has outlined, finding non-state local partners can be difficult, particularly given civil society can be weak and inaccessible in post-conflict environments, and communities themselves may not feel they have the tools to engage in discussions about security. Supporting the development and functioning of inclusive community safety structures can be problematic and potentially destabilising where grievances, distrust and animosity remain. Many groups at the community level (and the state level) may not be committed to peace or, at least, the peace process as they see it. Yet, where structures can be supported they can contribute to addressing the security needs of potentially conflicting groups. They can also help provide legitimate ways in which grievances can be aired and dealt with, although it is recognised that airing grievances can sometimes enflame tensions. They can also help to encourage people to believe that everyone has a stake in the future of their country. Conversely, not incorporating those at the community-level into SSR processes risks turning potential harbingers of reform into potential spoilers. As Meharg and Arnusch (2010) warned in respect of Liberia, for example, community-based and non-state security actors, which may have helped fill the security gap in the absence of functioning state institutions, could have become spoilers unless they were better incorporated into the SSR process.

One of the biggest challenges, of course, is securing widespread support for community safety structures and their incorporation into broader structures addressing security and justice needs. In Kosovo in 2010, for instance, the potential of the community safety structures was limited due to sub-optimal resources and capacity, public awareness which contributed to limited engagement of communities beyond public officials, cross-Ministry engagement, co-ordination and information-sharing (Gordon 2010; KCSS 2010).

Despite the challenges, it is argued that integrating community-based structures could potentially help promote more substantive and inclusive local ownership: people would be better able to influence decisions about their own security; policy decisions would more likely be predicated upon the concerns and priorities articulated at the community level; and supporting the active engagement of marginalised groups would help ensure that their security needs and concerns could be addressed.

Nonetheless, it is likely that the challenges noted above constitute some of the reasons why local ownership at the community-level remains negligible in many cases, despite policy direction (UN 2008) and academic critique (see, for example, Caparini 2010; Cubitt 2013; Donais 2009; Sedra 2010a). Broadening the scope of actors actively engaged in SSR is considered to be highly complex, risky, costly and particularly difficult for organisations that are accustomed to controlling processes and quantifying results. The focus of local ownership may continue to be at the state-level because it is easier to deal with a limited demographic, particularly one that is more familiar and conveniently located. There may also be assumptions about the level of expertise required for engagement in SSR, or the extent to which views about security may vary throughout society. Reluctance to engage communities

more directly and comprehensively in SSR may be a result of lack of consensus among engaged actors on the aim and approach of SSR, as well as of perceived urgency in the need to undertake reforms and respond to security challenges, as has been the case in DRC in the last decade (Hendrickson and Kasongo 2010).

It is also important to acknowledge that dominant or elite groups may not want an empowered and knowledgeable citizenry, let alone one that can influence decisions about the security sector. There is a risk, therefore, that promoting a community safety approach to SSR could result in state-level actors disengaging from the reform process. This fear of non-engagement of leaders in central security and political structures also explains why local ownership at the community level has not been promoted to a greater extent.

It is recognised that the interests of external actors will not necessarily correlate in different contexts with the interests of local actors (see Kunz and Valasek 2012; Luckham and Kirk 2013, for instance), particularly those at the community level whose interests may also be at odds with national government or state-level actors (see Kunz and Valasek 2012). Moreover, it may not be in the immediate interests of external actors, as well as local dominant groups, to empower those at the community level. However, it is argued that external actors need to be courageous enough to look beyond the familiar, state-centric approach and be prepared for the unpredictable, rather than imposing known-solutions and processes which may be less risky but only, it is argued, in the short-term (see Scheye 2009, for instance). Promoting a people-centred, bottom-up approach to SSR can, in fact, help to address concentrations of power which feed corruption, organised crime and insecurity. These phenomena are common in post-conflict environments and can significantly undermine the prospects of a sustainable peace.

External actors also need to be committed enough to prioritise the security of individuals, above more strategic interests (such as counter-terrorism – see Lawrence 2012). In so doing, the international community needs to embrace the complexity and longevity of peacebuilding endeavours, including SSR, and ensure those actors who engage locals at the community level are provided with the financial and political support required. It also needs to be genuinely acknowledged that sustainable peace is unlikely if there is limited engagement of those who will determine if peace prevails and those who will suffer if it does not. As highlighted by Kalyvas (2006) and Odendaal (2013), agency is multiple and dispersed in conflict and it follows that it should be similarly so in peacebuilding. Consequently, whether or not peace can flourish depends upon a complex relationship between elites at the state-level and those at the community level. In recognition of this, a hybrid approach to SSR and broader peacebuilding is proposed. As Kaldor (2012, 131) explains, ‘alternative sources of power’, such as women’s groups and other civil society organisations, are often overlooked in efforts to resolve conflict and build peace. This results in missing valuable opportunities to build peace and exposes ‘a myopia about the character of power and the relationship between power and violence’ (Kaldor 2012, 131), assuming that only those at central levels and with the propensity to violence be included to any degree in negotiating and building peace.

Being attentive to the challenges and potential limitations mentioned above, and engaging community safety structures from the planning and design stages of SSR, throughout implementation and thereafter, can help to create security sector institutions that are responsive and trusted. This could enhance the democratic accountability of the security sector as well as increase its effectiveness. This improved capability could enable the successful and timely departure of an international community presence. Incorporating community safety structures into SSR programmes can also bridge the gap between the state and its people and, as a result, help build state legitimacy and resilience. Consequently, SSR programmes would more likely be locally owned, people-centred and context-specific – as intended, in theory – and, therefore, more likely to be successful. The prospects of building a sustainable peace would therefore be significantly higher.

Conclusion

While there have been recent improvements regarding promoting local ownership of SSR (Caparini 2010; Heupel 2012), the concept of local ownership remains vague and, at best, narrowly interpreted both in terms of who the locals are and what ownership constitutes. This is despite policy guidance underscoring the importance of SSR programmes being inclusive and local ownership being meaningful. This article has emphasised the vital importance of ensuring that civil society and the wider public constitute the ‘local’ that should ‘own’ the process and outcomes of SSR. State security institutions need to be responsive to the people and enjoy their trust and confidence, to support the outcome of SSR and broader peacebuilding processes. This article suggests that inclusive local ownership can be facilitated through incorporating community safety structures into the framework of SSR programmes. A number of issues need attending to, not least ensuring the representation of marginalised and other vulnerable groups in society. However, it is argued that such an approach could enhance security sector responsiveness, effectiveness and legitimacy. The process of incorporating community-level groups can also have many other benefits, including raising awareness of security issues; enhancing relationships between communities and security and administrative officials; and contributing to reconciliation efforts. In short, actively engaging groups at the community level in decision-making throughout the SSR process can result in more context-specific, people-centred, inclusive and substantively locally-owned SSR processes and outcomes, and, ultimately, to more successful and sustainable SSR and peacebuilding endeavours.

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