



Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed  
Forces (DCAF)

Policy Paper - №8

**Security Sector Governance in West Africa:  
Turning Principles to Practice**

*Alan Bryden, Boubacar N'Diaye & 'Funmi Olonisakin*

Geneva, November 2005



**GENEVA CENTRE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC CONTROL OF  
ARMED FORCES (DCAF)**

**POLICY PAPER - №8**

**Security Sector Governance in West Africa:  
Turning Principles to Practice**

*Alan Bryden, Boubacar N'Diaye & 'Funmi Olonisakin*

Geneva, November 2005

## About the Authors

Alan Bryden is Deputy Head of Research at the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF).

Boubacar N'Diaye teaches Black Studies and Political Science at the College of Wooster in Ohio.

'Funmi Olonisakin is Director, Conflict Security and Development Group, International Policy Institute, King's College, London.



### **Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces**

The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) is an international foundation whose mission is to assist the international community in pursuing good governance and reform of the security sector.

To this end, the Centre develops and promotes appropriate norms at the international and national levels, determines good practices and relevant policy recommendations for effective governance of the security sector, and provides in-country advisory support and practical assistance programmes to all interested actors.

Visit us at [www.dcaf.ch](http://www.dcaf.ch)

Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces  
(DCAF):  
rue de Chantepoulet 11, PO Box 1360, CH-1211 Geneva 1,  
Switzerland  
Tel: ++41 22 741 77 00; fax: ++41 22 741 77 05;  
e-mail: [info@dcaf.ch](mailto:info@dcaf.ch)

0011-51011-PP

DCAF Policy Papers offer debate and policy recommendations on issues of security governance. These works are commissioned by DCAF.

Copyright © 2005 by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces

ISBN 92-9222-034-9

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. The Context for Security Sector Reform in West Africa .....</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1. ECOWAS and the Sub-Regional Context.....	2
2.2. Civil Society and Security Sector Governance in West Africa .....	4
<b>3. Signposts for Security Sector Reform within West African States .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. An Analysis of Reform Settings in West Africa .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5. Opportunities and Constraints for SSR.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>6. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Annex: Classification of States According to Signposts for SSR .....</b>	<b>15</b>

## **Abstract**

While other regions of Africa have had their share of crises, the challenge of meeting numerous security threats has been particularly arduous in West Africa. Nevertheless, there are unmistakable signs that the sub-region is beginning to fully awaken to the need to tackle its security crisis. This article argues that although the creation of democratic spaces in democratising states or complete rebuilding of collapsed states provides greater opportunities for security sector reform (SSR), democratisation does not necessarily lead to democratic governance of the security sector. To illustrate these points, a categorisation is proposed, classifying each West African state against a number of 'signposts' linked to security sector governance. A combination of norm-setting at the sub-regional level as well as activism in the non-governmental sector across the region is driving the move (even if slow and seemingly uncoordinated) toward improved governance, including in the security sector at the national level. However, the commitment of states to principles of good governance at the inter-governmental level does not naturally lead to corresponding change within the state. There is therefore a clear need to promote a security sector governance (SSG) agenda at both sub-regional and national levels in order to expand the space for meaningful SSR processes in West Africa.

# Security Sector Governance in West Africa: Turning Principles to Practice

Alan Bryden, Boubacar N'Diaye & 'Funmi Olonisakin

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Even a cursory look at recent developments in the West African sub-region would tend to substantiate the claim that “West Africa is one of the world’s most unstable regions”.<sup>2</sup> The crisis in Côte d’Ivoire lingers on while coup plots were recently reported in Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea Bissau and Mauritania. Furthermore, it is still too early to say whether the predominantly external pressures that led to the scheduling of elections in Togo following the death of President Eyadema, reversing the armed forces imposition of his son Faure Gnassingbe as ruler, will herald a truly democratic evolution in that country. These and other similar developments in West Africa seem to cut across the dividing lines of colonial inheritance and must be brought under control.

While other regions of Africa have had their share of crises, the challenge of meeting numerous security threats has been particularly arduous in West Africa. The sub-region is still in the throes of uncertainty and instability even as some notable national efforts exist and collective responses are being designed and painfully implemented. This is due to a combination of regional dynamics and particularly destabilising domestic deficiencies linked to (historical and current) mismanagement of the military, poor governance and weak state capacities.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, there are unmistakable signs that, through its collective regional integration instrument, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS),<sup>4</sup> the sub-region is beginning to fully awaken to the need to tackle its security crisis. Only such collective will and sustained efforts to carry out urgently needed far-reaching transformation of the security environment across the sub-region and within individual states are likely to reduce the high cost to West Africa of constant instability and violence.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This Policy Paper is based on an article by the authors which first appeared as: Bryden, A. N'Diaye, B. and Olonisakin, F. 'Democratising Security Sector Governance in West Africa: Trends and Challenges'; *Conflict, Security and Development* 5:2 (August 2005) Routledge, London, pp. 203-226.

<sup>2</sup> Ero, C. and Temin, J., 2004. 'Sources of Conflict in West Africa', in Sriram, C. L., (ed.), *Exploring Subregional Conflicts*. Lynne Rienner, Boulder, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> See Kandeh, J., 2004. 'Civil-Military Relations', in Adebajo A. and Rashid, I., (eds.), *West Africa's Security Challenges, Building Peace in a Troubled Region*. Lynne Rienner, Boulder, pp. 146-150; also Howe, H. M., 2000. *Ambiguous Order: Military Forces in African States*. Lynne Rienner, Boulder, pp. 28-50.

<sup>4</sup> All West African States are members except Mauritania which, having helped set up the organisation in 1975 withdrew its membership in 2000.

<sup>5</sup> This article draws on the interim results of a DCAF research project on the challenges of security sector governance in West Africa. The project will result in a publication providing a stocktaking and analysis of security sector governance in the West African sub-region using country studies by authors from the 16 countries of the sub-region: Bryden, A., N'Diaye, B. and Olonisakin, F., 2006 (forthcoming). *The Challenges of Security Sector Governance in West Africa*, Lit Verlag, Münster.

Despite the serious challenge to regional security posed by armed conflict and instability in West Africa, the last decade has witnessed varying degrees of transition within the majority of West African states and in the sub-region as a whole. Tangible progress has been realised in the effort to shift the region from old authoritarian patterns of governance to more participatory systems and as part of this process the security establishment has been the focus of significant attention.

This article argues that although the creation of democratic spaces in democratising states or complete rebuilding of collapsed states provides greater opportunities for security sector reform (SSR), democratisation does not necessarily lead to democratic governance of the security sector. The extent and pace of reform depends on factors that will be considered in the latter part of this article and illustrated by the particular case of Sierra Leone. On one level this is intended to clarify the overall governance frameworks within which security sector governance (SSG) is situated and the extent to which they are more (or less) conducive to reform. Moreover, while recognising the context-specific nature of each national case, a number of key themes and influences are identified that may be relevant beyond national borders.

It is also suggested that a combination of norm-setting at the sub-regional level as well as activism in the non-governmental sector across the region is driving the move (even if slow and seemingly uncoordinated) toward improved governance, including in the security sector at the national level. However, the commitment of states to principles of good governance at the inter-governmental level does not naturally lead to corresponding change within the state, as illustrated by the categorisation of different states' progress against the criteria for effective SSG proposed in this article.

## **2. The Context for Security Sector Reform in West Africa**

### **2.1. ECOWAS and the Sub-Regional Context**

When it was originally set up in 1975, ECOWAS was not intended to play any role in the security arena: in its founders' minds economic integration was its vocation. Though inter-state conflicts and instances of mercenary attempts to destabilise member states led to the protocols on non-aggression and mutual assistance in defence matters, in 1978 and 1981 respectively, security did not become the major preoccupation of ECOWAS until the 1990s when the organisation made a major attitudinal shift, insisting on the intrinsic relationship between security and political good governance.<sup>6</sup> While the efforts of the organisation in the form of varyingly successful military interventions have received extensive scholarly interest, the efforts to oversee the emergence of desirable regional norms in the area of security and the active search for solutions when a breakdown occurs, though remarkable, have received less attention.

---

<sup>6</sup> Chabmas, M. I., 2004. 'Foreword', in Adebajo A. and Rashid, I., (eds.), *West Africa's Security Challenges, Building Peace in a Troubled Region*. Lynne Rienner, Boulder, p. xiii; also Aning, K., 2003. *NEPAD's Democratic and Governance Agenda and its Linkages to ECOWAS's Protocols*. Unpublished paper presented at the Consultation on Strengthening Human Security Capacities of ECOWAS and West African Civil Society, Abuja May 30-June 1, 2003.



Throughout most of the 1990s into the new millennium, a flurry of protocols and declarations were adopted accompanied by frequent mediation missions to conflict areas and to states where coups were in progress or tensions dangerously high. In these instruments, ECOWAS identified principles key to reducing regional tensions and nurture domestic stability. As ECOWAS Executive Secretary Mohamed Ibn Chambas stated, in these protocols ECOWAS set out “guiding principles for intrastate relations that would help foster participatory democracy, good governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and a balanced and equitable distribution of resources, among a host of others – all issues the neglect of which results in instability within states.”<sup>7</sup> Thanks to a standing mediation structure, the organisation endeavored to stay on top of developing crises and mobilised considerable resources, including troops for peacekeeping and post conflict situations, most significantly in the Mano River basin.

One of the first instruments, which set the tone for a ‘good governance regime’ in the sub-region was the 1991 ECOWAS Declaration of Political Principles, which promotes multiparty politics and representative institutions that set guarantees for personal safety and freedom. This was closely followed by a new ECOWAS Treaty in 1993, which emphasises the importance of democracy and the rule of law. The most elaborate and candid in terms of its explicit linkage of peace, security, and good governance (besides NEPAD) is the Dakar 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance that supplemented the protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (which was initially adopted in December 1999). In this protocol, the Heads of State of the sub-region painstakingly laid out the prerequisites for peace and security in some 50 articles covering such headline issues as the role of the armed forces, police, and security forces in a democracy, elections, and rule of law, human rights, and good governance. They agreed on the imperative for appropriately trained, non-partisan, apolitical, autonomous, and subordinated military and security forces, and on the role of the state and its duties and responsibilities toward its citizens. They further agreed explicitly to prescriptive measures to enhance their responsiveness to their people as a means to avoid conflicts. They also stipulated the strengthening of state institutions, including an independent judiciary and election organising and monitoring structures. A major innovation was agreement on sanctions (article 45) in case of massive violations of human rights by a member within its borders.

Among the most recent instruments ECOWAS has adopted throughout the last decade is the 2003 Declaration on a Sub-Regional Approach to Peace and Security issued by West African Heads of State and Governments. In that declaration, adopted amid severe tensions and protracted conflicts throughout the sub-region, they reiterate that only a concerted regional approach can guarantee peace, security and stability in the sub-region. They further stress their commitment to democratic consolidation and rejection of force as a means to pursue or maintain power. The ECOWAS Secretariat and rotating chair have continued to play a very active role in efforts to broker peace in Côte d’Ivoire (the so-called Lomé III accord), diffuse tense situations in Guinea Bissau, obtain a settlement of the Liberian civil war, and address the succession issue in Togo, while closely monitoring political, socio-economic, and security data in its four geographical zones to anticipate potential breakdowns.

---

<sup>7</sup> Chambas, M. I., ‘Foreword’, p. xiii.

## 2.2. Civil Society and Security Sector Governance in West Africa

In addition to the emergence of a normative framework at the sub-regional level, which has contributed to the promotion of democratic spaces at the national level, civil society efforts have also helped create a complementary channel of influence. This sector can and should become an increasingly important player in the effort to promote effective SSG in West Africa. Norm-setting creates an enabling environment for reform and galvanises local civil society actors to exert sustained pressure on governments to adhere to their commitments. Non-governmental actors are presented with the much needed legitimacy to organise around critical governance issues. The past three years have witnessed the creation, for example, of regional and sub-regional networks on peace and security, including networks on security sector reform. These regional networks have been useful in maintaining momentum on key regional initiatives.<sup>8</sup> The West African Network on Small Arms (WANSAs), for example, played a crucial role in placing a Small Arms Unit within ECOWAS and a Supplementary Protocol on the Moratorium on the Importation and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons on the agenda of an ECOWAS Ministerial Meeting in Dakar in January 2003. This was the first time that civil society actors gained entry into an ECOWAS Ministerial meeting. This was repeated in Accra in December 2003 when representatives of the ECOWAS Civil Society Forum addressed the Summit of Heads of State and Government.

Such regional and sub-regional networks have been particularly useful from the point of view of local actors in states where the space for expression and activism remains limited. Collective opinion and action among active regional groups serves as a valuable pressure point and reduces the exposure of local activists to danger at home. It is possible for network members based in Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal to freely articulate positions that their counterparts operating from Togo or Côte d'Ivoire cannot freely express. It also provides much needed support for civil society actors operating in difficult and dangerous environments. This has been a pattern of interaction within regional networks in the past few years.

An interesting and unprecedented development has been the opening up of ECOWAS to influence from West African civil society. The ECOWAS Secretariat has been open to pursuing partnerships with civil society groups, resulting in May 2003 in the Executive Secretary's decision to establish a Civil Society Coordination Unit within ECOWAS. A West African Civil Society Forum was also established to act as an interface with the Coordinating Unit in ECOWAS, resulting in the formalisation of ECOWAS-civil society collaboration.<sup>9</sup> This has radically transformed the way in which this sub-regional inter-governmental body interacts with non-state entities. The former obtains expert advice from civil society in a coordinated way and the latter gains much needed legitimacy for various activities across the sub-region. It should be noted however that this partnership has been driven largely by the ECOWAS Secretariat with strong support from the Executive Secretary, Ibn Chambas. His enthusiasm is not necessarily shared by representatives of all Member States, some of whom are anxious to reduce civil society influence and pressures. Nonetheless, the opening up of this space has provided the opportunity to firmly place regional SSR initiatives on the agenda of ECOWAS in the

---

<sup>8</sup> Examples include the African Security Sector Reform Network and its sub-regional components established with the support of the Global Facilitation Network for Security Sector Reform; the West Africa Network on Small Arms (WANSAs); and the West Africa Civil Society Forum.

<sup>9</sup> Communiqué of First ECOWAS-Civil Society Consultation, Abuja, Nigeria, 1 June 2003.

same way that civil society facilitated the inclusion of key small arms initiatives on its agenda.

### **3. Signposts for Security Sector Reform within West African States**

In West Africa, democratisation, however genuine, has not necessarily resulted in a purposeful reform of the security sector. This has led to situations where little attention was paid to carrying out much needed reform of the security apparatus, though profound transformation of the political system in a promising democratic direction clearly invited a thoroughgoing security sector overhaul. Of course, the benefits of a true transformation of the political culture cannot but affect in significant ways the daily interactions between the security apparatus and society in these states. However, this does not necessarily substitute for a purposeful and systematic reform process.

This section proposes a number of criteria which are indicative of a reforming trend in the governance of a state's security sector. This is particularly important because the norms of democratic governance which may be identified and promulgated at regional and sub-regional levels can only be implemented through the application of sustainable, participative reform processes at the national level. By looking at key themes through this lens the overarching normative framework can be linked to real possibilities for and constraints on meaningful change for different countries in the sub-region.

Perhaps the most visible sign of an emerging SSR process is a government's stated commitment to reform by garnering the political will necessary to engage in significant transformation of the security sector. However, political will enhances perception rather than reality. A number of other factors constitute relevant criteria for reform:<sup>10</sup>

1. A clear and unambiguous statement of the key principles that will guide the management of the security forces. Such principles would often outline, for example, the roles and responsibilities of political actors, including the role of parliament and other oversight functions by government, the roles and tasks envisaged for each security agency and the broad democratic principles to which the security forces should adhere.
2. A clear security policy, defined as early as possible in the reform process. Where this is absent, new policy should be outlined. Political, public, bureaucratic and personal factors are critically important in the formulation and implementation of policy. It is equally important that the policy environment is transparent and participatory, and that leaders at all levels are accountable.
3. A clear policy framework within which the relationship between the security forces and the civil authorities can be both articulated and managed.

---

<sup>10</sup> These criteria have been elaborated upon in a number of sources. See for example, Ball, N., et al, 2003. 'Security Sector Governance in Africa', in Ramcharan, B., (ed.), *Human Rights and Human Security*. Palgrave, New York; Ball, N. and Fayemi, K., (eds.), 2004. *A Handbook on Security Sector Governance in Africa*. Centre for Democracy and Development, Lagos; and OECD, 2004. *Security System Reform and Governance: Policy and Good Practice*, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series.

4. A clear policy framework set down by government within which the transformation of the security sector will be managed. This generally includes policy statements, strategic defence and security reviews, concept documents, and transformation strategies.
5. A reform agenda and process that is locally owned and driven. This is particularly relevant in situations where the reform programme is largely supported from external sources.

After the establishing the framework and principles, the following indicators more clearly demonstrate commitment and progress in SSR:

- Building capacity among parliamentary oversight committees and other civil management and oversight actors such as the ministry of finance, the office of the auditor general, and the ministry of defence;
- Managing critical human resource issues confronting the security forces, such as downsizing, institution of equity programmes in the recruitment and promotion policies of the various security forces and transformation of the leadership, command and management culture of those forces;
- Reprofessionalising the security forces, including the separation of specialist civil policing and external defence functions and reorienting the intelligence services to protect the state and its population rather than political elites; and
- Preparing the security forces for new roles and tasks such as peace missions, military aid to the civil community, or combating transnational crime.

These are not freestanding activities on an SSR 'to do' list but must be embedded within a wider framework of democratic governance. In order to address underlying societal rifts, reform processes must be participative, inclusive and responsive to the needs of the population. It is also important that efforts are sustainable, long-term and geared towards building capacity in both security actors and their various formal and informal oversight bodies. The principles of local ownership and sustainability are particularly important in cases where the international community is involved and it is all too easy to impose external views and approaches.

The following section relates the criteria described above to how different West African states have progressed in terms of SSR. In particular, it demonstrates that the adoption of a more open system of governance or the creation of an opportunity for comprehensive reform, which post-conflict rebuilding offers, does not necessarily advance SSR processes.

#### **4. An Analysis of Reform Settings in West Africa**

An exercise in categorisation is daunting given the difficulty in fitting countries with rapidly evolving political systems and constant security challenges into neat categories. In West Africa, the task is arguably even more problematical. The extreme diversity of the countries of the sub-region, the involvement of external actors in the management of

their security sectors, as well as their recent evolutions all add to the difficulty of systematic categorisation. Yet another difficulty is the vastly varied range of experiences in democratisation and governance practices. Nevertheless, the interim findings of the research project that underpins this article provide an interesting comparison between the nature of governance in the sixteen West African states and their potential or actual SSR processes. (See annex ‘Classification of States according to Signposts for SSR’)

Although committed to reform Mali, Senegal, Cape Verde, Benin, Ghana, and Niger, faced with the competing demands of a new political dispensation have been unable to focus on SSR. The four latter states are struggling to make democracy irreversible and have carried out little substantive overhaul of their security sectors. Mali, on the other hand, is renowned for the remarkable strides made not only in instituting a working democratic system, but also in reforming its military and other security forces.<sup>11</sup> However, examples of political corruption, long porous borders open to refugee flows, small arms and other forms of trafficking, a growing, unregulated private security sector and an endemic lack of resources calls into question the long term sustainability of these reforms.<sup>12</sup> Senegal has enjoyed a long running pluralist and tolerant political system, with a comparatively well managed security apparatus. But similar cross border trafficking issues, privatisation of security, a lack of emphasis on community-focused policing and the long-running conflict in the Casamance region of the country – which have seen abuses by both government and rebel forces – are all causes for concern.<sup>13</sup>

Nigeria, The Gambia, and Burkina Faso, have in common the absence of serious or sustained approaches to reform from the regimes in power, or, indeed, to the obligations flowing from the various protocols outlined above despite the existence of a vigorous opposition and a vibrant and capable civil society. Reform-related activities are occurring in varying degrees in each of these states. While Nigeria, with a long history of military intervention in politics had to take steps to reverse this trend, as demonstrated by the Obasanjo regime’s removal of political officers evincing a lack of respect for civil authorities, the others were not faced with this sense of urgency. Nigeria has also embarked on several re-professionalisation programmes for the military, largely with external support, whereas this has been absent in the other two. In Burkina Faso, we have seen an emerging civil society campaign against perceived excesses of security agencies, which may have contributed to the 2004 decree clarifying roles of security actors. All however share a limited knowledge base and weak oversight institutions.

In the case of states emerging from years of civil war, despite major efforts at disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) after the cessation of hostilities, little attention was typically paid to the need to carry out profound transformation of the overall security apparatus, beyond the disarmament, partial demobilisation, and merger of formerly insurgent groups into a ‘national’ military apparatus. This represents in these states – Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, and Côte d’Ivoire – a potential afforded by the end of conflict that has typically not been capitalised on. However, as discussed below, a number of positives can be drawn from the situation in Sierra Leone which may

---

<sup>11</sup> For an analysis of the transition in Mali see Poulton, R.E., and Youssouf, I. A., 1998. *A Peace of Timbuktu. Democratic Governance, Development and African Peacemaking*. UNIDIR, Geneva.

<sup>12</sup> Sangaré, N., 2006 (forthcoming). ‘The Case of Mali’, in Bryden, A., N’Diaye, B. and Olonisakin, F., (eds.), *The Challenges of Security Sector Governance in West Africa*.

<sup>13</sup> Tall, S., 2006 (forthcoming). ‘The Case of Senegal’, in Bryden, A., N’Diaye, B. and Olonisakin, F., (eds.), *The Challenges of Security Sector Governance in West Africa*.

augur well for future engagement in Liberia. Obviously, the states in this category vary widely in their outlook and the stage reached in the management of their post-conflict situation. Indeed, we would hope that despite its currently very tense situation, Côte d'Ivoire will eventually be in a position to be a truly post-conflict state.

In the final category of West African states, there has been at best only cosmetic political change, in the shape of a tightly controlled liberalisation of the pre-existing authoritarian structure. The resulting regimes in these states – Togo, Guinea, Mauritania – rely on a largely untouched security apparatus, conceived as the regime's repressive arm. In each of these countries, the security sector is personalised and tightly controlled by close family members or ethnic kin of the head of state and a reform, even less transformation of the security sector and its oversight is not in view as long as the political system is not itself genuinely democratised. A distinguishing characteristic of these states is the high risk of degeneration into violence, particularly on the disappearance of the long reigning head of state. Recent events in Togo provide a mixed picture with the positive example of planned elections offset by the fact that the army was able initially to impose its candidate of choice and that the legislature was swiftly co-opted into endorsing such a move.

### **SSR in a post-conflict setting - Sierra Leone**

In Sierra Leone systematic collapse of the structures of governance resulted in the collapse of the state. It experienced a civil war from March 1991, which lasted almost a decade. The collapse of Sierra Leone's governance system had three key elements. First was personal rule which led to over-centralisation of power in the hands of the president, with opposition denied voice and access and a parliament that existed in name only, leading to the establishment of a one-party state in 1978.<sup>14</sup> Second, recruitment, appointment and promotion of personnel in the security establishment were heavily politicised. Often, cronies and relatives of politicians and elements of the urban youth mobilised to repress political opponents were recruited into the armed forces without consideration for merit.<sup>15</sup> They were in turn promoted above professional officers with disdain for the formal hierarchy of the armed forces. The politicisation of the security establishment was completed with the integration of the heads of Police and the Armed Forces into Government as serving Members of Parliament.<sup>16</sup> Third and consequently, the security forces were poorly trained and lacking in discipline. This was inevitable given the politicisation of recruitment and promotions, which systematically destroyed the security establishment and heightened corruption, weakening morale given the neglect of welfare and lack of support for training and equipment.

---

<sup>14</sup> Abraham, A., 2000. 'The Quest for Peace in Sierra Leone', in Olonisakin, F., (ed.), Engaging Sierra Leone. Centre for Democracy and Development, London.

<sup>15</sup> Turay, E. and Abraham, A., 1987. *The Sierra Leone Army: A Century of History*. Macmillan, London.

<sup>16</sup> Kondeh, A., 2006 (forthcoming). 'The Case of Sierra Leone', in Bryden, A., N'Diaye, B., and Olonisakin, F., (eds.), *The Challenges of Security Sector Governance in West Africa*.

UK involvement in Sierra Leone's military reform began in June 1999 with the launching of the first phase of Sierra Leone Security Sector Reform Programme (SILSEP). A UK Military Advisor and a civilian from the UK MoD were posted to Sierra Leone to assist the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) with the restructuring of its MoD including creation of a joint military and civilian staffed MoD. It was also recognised that this had to be achieved in conjunction with the re-creation of the armed forces. A UK battalion and International Military Training and Advisory Team (IMATT) were deployed in 2000, partly to assist the GoSL to repel the rebels following the crisis of May 2000. IMATT officers were placed in key command positions in the army and in the MoD because of operational exigencies. The second phase of SILSEP saw a greater introduction of civilian defence management within the MoD. A third phase has among other things sought to apply lessons from the earlier elements of this process.

The key objective of the UK-led process was the creation of professional, well-equipped armed forces (amid other competing rebuilding tasks) as a prerequisite for maintenance of a secure environment in which other rebuilding and development activities could occur. Reflecting on the signposts highlighted above, the notable outcomes of the UK-led reform process thus far include the creation of a better trained and professional armed forces; the establishment of an MoD under joint civilian and military management accommodated in a new headquarters; a newly established and functioning Office of National Security (ONS) and a Central Intelligence and Security Unit (CISU) all with suitably qualified personnel; and publication of the Defence White Paper.<sup>17</sup>

Stakeholders have expressed concerns which relate to the mixed results that such strong external support can generate. Three are of particular concern: funding and sustainability of the armed forces; effective oversight mechanisms; and, local ownership of the process.

The UK government has contributed significantly to the reform process, through provision of human resources, equipment and cash.<sup>18</sup> There are however concerns over the GoSL's ability to sustain the capacity and standards achieved with the support of the UK government.<sup>19</sup> The funding gap that will be created when UK assistance is exhausted may have a knock on effect on other reform processes unless there is a clear plan to deal with this gap. It also threatens to weaken morale of the new armed forces who have become used to a particular standard of equipment and support.

With greater public scrutiny and external pressures, it will become increasingly difficult for the GoSL to resort to the traditional inclination among some governments to hide defence expenditure in the budgets of social ministries such as health and education. However, there is cause for concern about the quality of oversight in institutions charged with this responsibility. Oversight institutions such as parliamentary committees on defence do not yet have a robust capacity to maintain oversight as they

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> It is estimated that the UK has provided about 21 million pounds in support of the Sierra Leone armed forces between 2000-2002.

<sup>19</sup> Horn, A. and Olonisakin, F., 2005. 'UK Lead Nation Approaches in Sierra Leone', in Peake, G. and Scheye, E., (eds.), *Security Sector Reform Policy and Practice*. Lynn Reinner, (forthcoming).

are inexperienced, underfunded and lacking in practice. This is all the more important with the creation of state security and intelligence structures such as the Office for National Security (ONS), which if not properly managed, can fall prey to misuse.

Local ownership is crucial for the sustainability of most reform processes. While the primary objective of IMATT was to provide advice and training that would assist in the development of effective and accountable armed forces, emergency conditions in 2000 led to IMATT performing a far greater operational role than initially anticipated – assuming control of field operations and the MoD. There was an understanding that this role would be gradually phased out to allow local commanders to take charge of operations and local civilian and military leadership to assume control of the MoD. The delay in transfer of responsibility had the undesired effect of creating leadership gaps (some of which can be attributed to differences in management culture) and in turn impacted on local leaders perceptions and sense of ownership.

The long term success of the reform efforts in Sierra Leone will depend on improvement in the overall governance environment in the country, improved coordination of all SSG activities and public confidence in the armed forces – which is not completely restored though slowly returning given improved professionalism.

## **5. Opportunities and Constraints for SSR**

Our analysis of the sub-regional, national, and societal dynamics of SSG in West Africa highlights that amid the range of achievements, half successes, and outright dysfunctions, an immense potential exists to steer states toward the peaceful democratic zone envisioned in the international instruments and initiatives reviewed above. A first step must be to properly identify, categorise, and better contextually explain the obstacles that still stand in the way of realising that vision. Meanwhile, it is also important to recognise that, as a whole, West Africa has made strides toward that vision. It is now accepted that security is no longer a ‘sacred cow’ left to executive branches and their security apparatuses, beyond the reach, even in theory, of any other branch of government, let alone civil society actors. This cannot but affect positively the whole sub-region, and beyond, the whole continent. This evolution certainly bears comparison with the SADC region, where, despite impediments comparable to those present in West Africa, substantial progress is being achieved thanks to the ‘emulation effect’ of the South African example in security governance issues. In this sense, West Africa is not unique. It simply reflects in one sub-region a continent-wide struggle to come to term with drastic governance deficits.

As has already been argued, democratisation does not necessarily imply a democratic transformation of the security sector. Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Niger, and Nigeria, all enjoy a widened political space, thriving free press and dynamic civil society organisations, but have carried out little, if any, transformation of their security apparatuses, remarkably illogical and counter-intuitive as this clearly appears. The recognition on the part of the main political actors at the national level that democratisation is indivisible and that responsiveness, effectiveness, and accountability



are mutually reinforcing values that must prevail in *all* sectors of national life remains elusive. For the states that cannot be credited with genuine democratic opening, the constraints are even more real. It is likely that the entrenched authoritarian regimes in Guinea, Mauritania, and Togo (with the hope of a different evolution in the latter) that have made just the cosmetic changes necessary to remain in power, will continue their resistance to genuine reform.<sup>20</sup>

The wholesale political, institutional, and security breakdown resulting from a civil war, quite unsettlingly, seems to offer the best hope for a thorough transformation of the security sector, provided the appropriate committed and sustained sponsorship of an external actor. The reality however shows that these contexts in themselves do not guarantee sustainable reform by the leadership. The experience of Liberia in 1996 revealed that such opportunities are often not seized among the local leadership or the international community. Where there is considerable international engagement, support and leadership, tangible progress has been made. Sierra Leone constitutes the best example in this regard and it is the only case in West Africa that has received dedicated assistance from a committed external actor, the United Kingdom. The new post-conflict phase in Liberia which followed the second wave of armed conflict that ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in August 2003 now presents another opportunity to undertake SSR. This new phase has witnessed greater international resolve, with a plan for SSR to be undertaken by a lead nation – the US. This, as in the case of Sierra Leone, has its own complexities.

This article also points to the need to foster a culture of ‘positive opportunism’ when it comes to pushing ahead the transformation of the security sector in states spared the catastrophe of collapse. Opportunities can present themselves in dramatic events, such as the failed coup attempts in Mauritania in June 2003 and Guinea-Bissau in October 2004. But they can also certainly come in less dramatic guise, such as the peaceful democratic transfer of power in Senegal, or simply as emulating positive developments in a neighboring state, or periodic administrative attempts at improving the lot of any part of the security sector. As a recent study has argued, Côte d’Ivoire’s current predicament can be traced to the inability or unwillingness of successive leaders to recognise and seize opportunities afforded them between 1993 and 2002.<sup>21</sup>

A genuinely acknowledged, empowered, and competent civil society can be a locus and catalyst for such positive opportunism. While it must be recognised that this involvement may not alone result in far-reaching reforms, thoughtful, pragmatic advances can result. In a post-conflict context, the inclusion of civil society actors under the 2003 Accra Peace Agreement for Liberia not just as observers but as part of the power sharing arrangement is an important departure.<sup>22</sup> More broadly, fostering participative approaches that systematically question the status quo, as introduced at the sub-regional level within ECOWAS, is invaluable. However a wide gap remains between recognition on the policy level of the need to broaden the debate to elements of society who have historically been ignored – women being a conspicuous example – and its application in

---

<sup>20</sup> See N’Diaye, B., Saine, A., and Hounnikpo, M., 2005. *Not Yet Democracy: West Africa’s Slow Farewell to Authoritarianism*. Carolina Academic Press, Durham, North Carolina, USA.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-50.

<sup>22</sup> Fayemi, K., 2004. ‘Governing Insecurity in Post-Conflict States: The Case of Sierra Leone and Liberia’, in Bryden, A. and Hänggi, H., (eds.), *Reform and Reconstruction of the Security Sector*. Lit Verlag, Münster, p. 186. Also available at [www.dcaf.ch](http://www.dcaf.ch)

practice. Often where such a role is emerging it comes at considerable risk. In addition to reflecting the necessary ownership of SSR processes, such an approach can be the best hope for recasting generally feeble levels of popular trust in security actors.

With regard to the role of international actors, aside from the importance of commitment of a major power to support and finance the rebuilding of collapsed states, external donors have a role to play in helping West African states engage in and sustain an SSR agenda. Although local ownership and popular participation are critical to success, it is important to recognise the heavy dependence of most West African states on developed countries and their institutions. While acknowledging the sensitivity of security issues and the legitimate concerns of essentially weak states, donors must make the principle of security a 'public good' in the provision of which efficiency, transparency, and accountability are important conditions of their assistance.

It is clear that the possibilities for reform, much less transformation, currently exist only in a small number of West African states. However the sub-region's security challenges transcend national borders. Therefore, where political will is lacking at the national level, entry points at the sub-regional level, primarily through ECOWAS, should be vigorously pursued. Donors should therefore coordinate their actions at the sub-regional level. This reinforces the point that where political will is not forthcoming at the national level, entry points at the sub-regional level, primarily through ECOWAS, should be vigorously pursued. This should also lessen the ready criticism of undue influence of external actors on sovereign states.

A final lesson to be drawn is an overarching one: the best setting for a successful and sustained SSR process is in the growth and strengthening of structures, institutions, and organisations, both sub-regionally and nationally, that are self-perpetuating and independent of external assistance. In West Africa as elsewhere on the continent, a transformative SSR agenda will be achieved through good practices and sound methods, combined efforts in institutional contexts, and long term commitments rather just the good will of individual actors.

## **6. Conclusion**

Through ECOWAS, West Africa has attempted collectively to rise to the challenge of instability, insecurity, and conflict. However, ultimately, individual states hold the key to implementing the principles adhered to in the declarations and protocols mentioned above. In an environment where power is still jealously guarded by the range of West African states (their elites more accurately), the challenge remains to get individual states to live up to their commitments and to concretely translate them into citizen-focused attitudes and policies. This has not been an easy task. This goal is made more complicated by the 'pitfalls' of democratisation. For former militarised or authoritarian states, this entails turning the back on entrenched practices and powerful albeit illegitimate interests, finding the right sequencing of steps and measures and balancing

reforms and risks, all of which are fraught with contradictions, tensions and risks of reversal, failure, or conflict.<sup>23</sup>

A close examination of actual practice in each of the countries of West Africa is required to assess correctly their specific needs with respect to security sector management and the inculcation of good governance generally. The aim of such reforms is to ensure that security structures are redesigned, genuinely depoliticised, professionalised, and willingly subordinated to a democratically elected civilian authority. At the same time, a deliberately prudent management of this new security sector must emerge that matches an accountable, responsive, and legitimate form of governance of the entire polity. While reforms must be context specific, in all contexts this should represent a transformation that goes beyond institutional reform to reflect basic human and societal needs.

This article has sought to highlight the relevance of the SSG agenda for West Africa, already recognised in normative terms at the sub-regional level, and the overall need for SSR at the national level despite often impressive changes in overarching political terms. This is an emerging area of both policy and practice. There is a clear need to broaden the discussion space for these issues among a wide range of stakeholders. However, African-centred analysis is emerging which needs to be fostered in order to better understand the opportunities and challenges to democratising security sector governance in West Africa.

---

<sup>23</sup> See Kandeh, J., 2004. 'Civil-Military Relations', pp. 150-166.



## Annex: Classification of States According to Signposts for SSR

Country & Classification	Level of Commitment to SSR	Key Principles & Framework	Local Ownership/Participation	Level of Progress
<b>Benin:</b> Democratising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited, no clear statements</li> <li>Successive elections and widening democratic spaces provide opportunity for reform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constitutional framework exists</li> <li>Some evidence that security organisations are accountable to elected authorities</li> <li>Civil society participation in policy still low</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elected government in control of limited process</li> <li>Culture of civil society participation is limited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited capacity for parliamentary oversight</li> <li>Difficult for civil society to gain access</li> </ul>
<b>Burkina Faso:</b> Stagnant - weak democratic control channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No stated commitment to reform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2004 Decree clarifying roles of security actors</li> <li>No Security or Defence Policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Civil society is engaged in constructive criticism of role of security agencies</li> <li>No opportunity to participate in policy reform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited role for oversight institutions and limited knowledge base</li> </ul>
<b>Cape Verde:</b> Democratising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No clear evidence of commitment to SSR but pursuit of democratisation agenda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constitutional framework</li> <li>Clear oversight roles &amp; channels of accountability</li> <li>Respect for civil authority by security sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Room for constructive dialogue with civil society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need for broadened knowledge base of SSR within civil society</li> </ul>
<b>Côte d'Ivoire:</b> Potential post-conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peace Agreement will provide an opening for reform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dependent on implementation of peace agreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too early to judge</li> </ul>	N/A
<b>Gambia:</b> Stagnant - weak democratic control channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No clear statements indicating commitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No clear policy and no strategic framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restricted civil society participation</li> <li>Overall lack of transparency</li> </ul>	N/A
<b>Ghana:</b> Democratising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government commitment to SSR demonstrated by its commitment to the Performance Improvement Programme in MoD</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing constitutional framework &amp; other legislation defining role of security institutions and oversight bodies</li> <li>No defence or security policy</li> <li>No strategic policy framework for the security services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reform efforts largely locally directed but strong external drive and supply-driven</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capacity building through seminars and training courses for military &amp; oversight bodies</li> <li>Civil society gradually developing knowledge base &amp; performing limited oversight activities</li> <li>Overall, oversight tradition still low; knowledge base still weak</li> </ul>

Country & Classification	Level of Commitment to SSR	Key Principles & Framework	Local Ownership/Participation	Level of Progress
<b>Guinea:</b> Resistance to Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No commitment to reform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constitutional framework unclear</li> <li>No security policy</li> <li>Lack of transparency in SSG</li> <li>Accountability mechanisms blurred &amp; irrelevant</li> <li>Lack of transparency in management of security sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Civil society totally excluded from security sector related issues</li> <li>Lack of knowledge base within civil institutions and civil society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No process of internal dialogue whatsoever on SSR</li> </ul>
<b>Guinea Bissau:</b> Potential post-conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Post-conflict phase not yet at advanced stage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not yet on agenda / not yet feasible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Civil society involvement in transitional process is encouraging and greater participation in any future SSR is likely</li> </ul>	N/A
<b>Liberia:</b> Post-conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peace Agreement provides for SSR</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constitutional framework does not fully support SSR: overwhelming powers in hands of President</li> <li>Organisations managing peace implementation process are not familiar with SSR</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited local ownership of ongoing reform / reconstruction processes</li> <li>But positive step that civil society representation included in peace agreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited understanding of what SSR entails among key local and international actors</li> <li>No coherence among those engaged in different aspects of reform</li> </ul>
<b>Mali:</b> Democratising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear statements of intent by government and the people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respect for constitutional framework</li> <li>Articulation of reform agenda by government in collaboration with civil society</li> <li>Respect for civilian authorities by security sector</li> <li>Transparency of policy process</li> <li>Role of oversight institutions well defined</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Process completely owned by the government and the people</li> <li>Civil society actively involved in planning and implementation of reform programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advanced state of reform</li> <li>Evidence of professional security sector</li> <li>Active role of oversight bodies</li> <li>External challenges to consolidation of democracy</li> </ul>
<b>Mauritania:</b> Resistance to Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No commitment to reform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Absence of security policy and no clear framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restricted democratic freedoms</li> </ul>	N/A
<b>Niger:</b> Democratising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some evidence of commitment to reform demonstrated by partnerships with key international agencies and facilitation of dialogue processes e.g. by NDI, UNDP, DPA</li> <li>But no clear policy statements on SSR</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear constitutional framework exists</li> <li>No security / defence policy</li> <li>Emerging process aimed at embedding culture of respect for civil authorities by the military</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Externally supported but nationally controlled processes</li> <li>Space for dialogue involving civil society organisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Process of Democratisation and reform ongoing</li> <li>Encouraging early signs of regime's commitment to change</li> <li>Constructive engagement by civil society</li> <li>Need for improved knowledge base on SSR</li> </ul>

Country & Classification	Level of Commitment to SSR	Key Principles & Framework	Local Ownership/Participation	Level of Progress
<b>Nigeria:</b> Recent transition weak democratic control channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Presidential statements on commitment to avoid return of military rule</li> <li>• Early action to reverse extreme politicisation of armed forces through retirement of political officers in the armed forces</li> <li>• No clear statements of commitment to an overall SSR agenda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No security policy or defence review process</li> <li>• Constitutional framework exists but superficial practice of oversight functions given limited knowledge base in Parliamentary Committees &amp; limited independence of action</li> <li>• Lack of horizontal accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reform-related activities are externally supported and driven through, process is controlled by government</li> <li>• Limited participation of civil society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-professionalisation of the armed forces</li> <li>• Largely with external support</li> <li>• Limited knowledge base of SSR but some oversight activities performed by civil society</li> <li>• Oversight still weak and lack of knowledge &amp; best practice within oversight institutions</li> </ul>
<b>Senegal</b> Democratising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some demonstration of commitment to reform by government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear constitutional framework and guidelines</li> <li>• Clear role for oversight institutions</li> <li>• Accountability and respect of civil authorities by security sector apparent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SSR-related activities largely led by government</li> <li>• Limited participation by civil society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge base within civil society is weak</li> </ul>
<b>Sierra Leone</b> Post-conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government commitment to full reform</li> <li>• A range of SSR-related activities undertaken as part of effort to move from collapsed state to viable, stable state</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constitutional framework but potentially blurs relationships e.g. President is also Minister for Defence</li> <li>• Security policy in the making</li> <li>• Emerging accountability by security sector to civil authority</li> <li>• Clear role of oversight institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SSR process largely externally driven and externally-led. Local government and commanders have limited leadership before management is transferred</li> <li>• Evidence of civil society involvement in the process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oversight institutions still relatively weakened by poor knowledge base and lack of adequate training. Parliamentary committees in particular require greater exposure to SSR issues</li> <li>• Sustainability difficult to predict as government has limited resources to continue the scale of reform once external actors leave</li> </ul>
<b>Togo</b> Resistance to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No commitment to reform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Framework blurred by domination of military and executive arm</li> <li>• Parliament heavily influenced by Military and executive arm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No civil society participation</li> <li>• Limited fundamental freedoms &amp; democratic spaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No oversight functions by oversight institutions &amp; civil society</li> </ul>