Security Sector Reform, Local Ownership and Community Engagement

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Abstract

Local ownership is widely considered to be one of the core principles of successful Security Sector Reform (SSR) programmes. Nonetheless, there remains a gap between policy and practice. This article examines reasons for this gap, including concerns regarding limited capacity and lack of expertise, time and cost constraints, the allure of quantifiable results and quick wins, and the need to ensure that other principles inherent to SSR are not disregarded. In analysing what is meant by local ownership, this article will also argue that, in practice, the concept is narrowly interpreted both in terms of how SSR programmes are controlled and the extent to which those at the level of the community are actively engaged. This is despite policy guidance underscoring the importance of SSR programmes being inclusive and local ownership being meaningful. It will be argued that without ensuring meaningful and inclusive local ownership of SSR programmes, state 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. The relationship between the state and its people will be weak and people will feel divorced from the decisions that affect their security and their futures. All this will leave the state vulnerable to renewed outbreaks of conflict. This article will propose that the requisite public confidence and trust in state security and justice sector institutions, and ultimately, the state itself, can be promoted by incorporating community safety structures into SSR programmes.

Introduction

It is widely agreed that local ownership is one of the fundamental principles of successful Security Sector Reform (SSR) programmes (Donais 2009; OECD 2007; Oosterveld and Galand 2012; Mobekk 2010). Nonetheless, there is a gap between policy and practice, which

this article will investigate in respect of SSR programmes in post-conflict environments. Reasons for the reluctance to promote local ownership will be analysed, particularly in light of general acceptance that lack of local ownership will result in institutions and processes that do not enjoy popular support and are, thus, likely to be unsustainable. Such reluctance to promote local ownership can be attributed to limited capacity and lack of expertise; time and cost constraints; the allure of quantifiable results and quick wins; and an awareness that other principles inherent to SSR may be jeopardised if local actors do not agree with them. The latter mentioned principles of SSR include the need for security institutions to be affordable, accountable, and representative of and responsive to the needs of the people. It will also be argued that the principle of local ownership is also not adhered to due to lack of clarity concerning who the locals are and what ownership constitutes: clarity would help avoid disguising buy-in as ownership and viewing locals as a homogenous whole. As such, this article will seek clarity on who is local and what is owned, concluding that the concept of local ownership is narrowly interpreted, both in terms of the extent to which SSR programmes are controlled and the extent to which those at the level of the community are actively engaged. This is despite policy guidance underscoring the importance of SSR programmes being inclusive and local ownership being meaningful.

The article closes by emphasising the vital importance of ensuring that civil society and the wider public comprise the 'local' that should 'own' the process of SSR, by being actively engaged from inception through design and implementation. Without ensuring meaningful and inclusive local ownership of SSR programmes, the resultant limited public confidence and trust in state security and justice sector institutions will leave the state vulnerable to renewed outbreaks of conflict. It will be suggested that the requisite public confidence and trust in state security and justice sector institutions, and ultimately, the state itself, can be promoted through incorporating community safety structures into SSR programmes.

This article draws from literature that addresses building security and justice in post-conflict environments, specifically with respect to local ownership and community engagement in SSR. In order to explore the disjuncture between policy and practice with respect to local ownership and SSR, the article also draws from the author's experience in building security and justice in post-conflict environments, while working for the United Nations (UN) and other organisations.

Security Sector Reform and Local Ownership

It is generally agreed that security is a prerequisite of sustainable peace, development and human rights (UN 2008; OECD 2007 and 2009). The importance to sustainable peace, development and human rights of effective and accountable security sector institutions is widely recognised (for example, UN 2008; OECD 2007). In the absence of functioning security institutions, stability, the rule of law, security and human rights are threatened. This adversely impacts the prospects for peace and, of course, wider regional stability and international security. The results of failures to build such institutions have been shown in

peace operations in Haiti, Liberia and Timor-Leste (UN 2008). Consequently, the reform or (re)construction of security and justice sector institutions in post-conflict environments is an increasingly significant feature of peacebuilding and recovery efforts (UN 2013 and 2008; Sedra 2010a).

The principle of local ownership is widely considered to be the main prerequisite of successful SSR (Donais 2009; OECD 2007; Oosterveld and Galand 2012; Mobekk 2010). Local ownership is instrumental to the success of SSR not least because security sector institutions, processes and policy must respond to local needs. If the institutions, processes and policies that are developed through SSR programmes do not respond to local needs, it follows that efforts to improve security and the rule of law will be compromised. If local security needs are largely unmet, it can also be assumed that 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). If the new or reformed security structures are at odds with local customs, traditions and practices, it is highly unlikely that they will remain intact and functioning after the departure of the international community (Scheye and Peake 2005; Nathan 2007). The likely results are that institutions will be rejected (see Smith-Höhn 2010 for example). Such a scenario, where judicial reform was undertaken with little consideration of local views, occurred in Timor-Leste., This resulted in the reformed formal court system remaining under-utilised as courts formerly run by Indonesians were distrusted (Oosterveld and Galand 2012; Stromseth, Wippman and Brooke 2006). More recently, the National Security Strategy (NSS) developed in Kosovo in 2009-2010 was 'quietly dropped from view by the Kosovo authorities and never implemented' (Blease and Qehaja 2013: 16) because, rather than providing advice and building the capacity of the national authorities to develop the NSS, the International Civilian Office (ICO) had undermined local ownership by drafting it. This left Kosovo 'without a realistic or realisable security strategy for some four years' (Blease and Qehaja 2013: 16) and without a solid basis for further reform.

More broadly, an approach that marginalises the engagement of local actors is likely to result in their 'resentment, resistance and inertia' (Nathan 2007: 3). This would compromise the peacebuilding process, increasing local actor frustration and dependence on external assistance (Narten 2009), which can lead to increased spoiler activity and, as a consequence, further dependency. A vicious circle can ensue whereby external actors become increasingly reluctant to promote local ownership – and, in the case of post-conflict Kosovo before its declaration of independence, for instance, reluctant to transfer competencies – due to increased dependency and destabilising spoiler activity or, rather, perceptions about capacity and legitimacy (Narten 2009).

However, while local ownership is part of the 'contemporary commonsense' of SSR (Donais 2009: 119), it is also widely observed that there is a significant gap between policy and practice (Donais 2009; Nathan 2007; Sedra 2010a), with external actors frequently imposing 'their models and programmes on local actors' (Nathan 2007: 7). It has also been argued that among reform principles, local ownership is overlooked more than any other (Scheye 2008; Oosterveld and Galand 2012). In order to examine why such a gap exists, it is necessary to analyse the perceived risks associated with local ownership and unpick the variously

perceived meanings of the terms 'local' and 'ownership', or as Mobekk (2010) and Martin and Wilson ask 'Which Locals? Ownership of What?' (Martin and Wilson 2008: 83).

Gap between Policy and Practice

Reluctance to fully promote local ownership of SSR programmes can be explained by perceived and actual limitations in terms of institutional and human capacity in post-conflict environments (see Sedra 2010b; DCAF 2009). Governments in post-conflict environments may lack the authority or credibility required to solicit public support for reform, if, for instance, they are widely perceived as having committed wartime atrocities (see Sedra 2010b). It is also widely perceived that the expertise required to develop, manage, implement and evaluate SSR programmes comes from the experience of having been engaged in SSR programmes before (which generally automatically excludes members of host nations), rather than expertise gained from experience in and knowledge of the country, including the conflict it has suffered (see Benedix and Stanley 2008). This could perhaps be better understood if the success rate of SSR programmes was less questionable (see Sedra 2010a; Zyke 2011, for instance).

As Hänggi has highlighted, given that most SSR programmes in post-conflict environments are developed and funded by donor states or multilateral organisations, which also provide the expertise and clout to push through reforms, 'the natural tendency is for external actors to promote their own reform models' (Hänggi 2009: 345). In particular, this includes promotion of models from their own countries (Nathan 2007). Accountability of donors and intergovernmental organisations to external governments rather than recipient countries (or host nations), and concern about their own security and strategic concerns rather than those of recipient countries (Nathan 2007; Donais 2009; Oosterveld and Galand 2012) also inhibit efforts to enhance local ownership.

There are also cost and time constraints, not least associated with donor funding cycles which demand outputs in short time-frames (Nathan 2007; OECD 2009; Oosterveld and Galand 2012). Such constraints lend themselves to using existing models, rather than creating context-specific models as an outcome of widespread consultation (DCAF 2009; Heupel 2012). Programmes that are seen to respond to developments quickly and implement change rapidly are also often seen as more effective and efficient, and the value of quick wins 'so that people can see and experience progress' is significant (Stabilisation Unit 2010: 11). Limiting broader local engagement might also be seen to avoid further problematising efforts to promote co-ordination and coherence among actors. The need for programmes to have a high degree of detail before securing funding also restricts the extent to which those programmes can be flexible and responsive to the local context (Nathan 2007).

In the aftermath of conflict, there is also a need to quickly establish security, without which SSR programmes cannot be implemented and the peace process may be undermined (Sedra 2010b). Consequently, the focus in post-conflict environments can often be on ensuring the structures and processes are in place to assume responsibility for security and rule of law

functions. This can often lead 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. As Jackson (2011) has argued, technocratic approaches to SSR may be understandable in places such as Afghanistan where immediate security concerns warranted swift action, but the risks for the longer term are heightened as a result. Such approaches can help build state institutions that lack legitimacy with the public and help protect and consolidate power for political elites, as has been seen in Timor-Leste (Jackson 2011) and fore-warned about in Arab-revolution countries (IISA 2012), for instance.

Similarly, the value placed upon quantifiable outputs (such as the number of police officers recruited or judges trained), which tend to dominate monitoring and evaluation processes, feed into a process which marginalises the relevance of the views and experiences of individuals (see OECD 2009; Sedra 2010b, for example). Consequently, such processes rarely capture the extent to which security and justice may have improved, and further undermine the extent to which SSR programmes can be seen to be genuinely locally owned. It is therefore apparent, as outlined by OECD (2009), that donor agencies can make a number of strategic shifts in the way that programmes are developed, delivered, monitored and evaluated, if local ownership and, thus, SSR success and sustainability is to improve.

However, it is not just the international community that needs to see quantifiable results and swift action, of course. Local communities may also feel more reassured by the expeditious creation of embryonic security structures rather than lengthy and widespread consultation of their security concerns and needs. Indeed, there have often been complaints about the delays which accompany the implementation of planned reforms. The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for example, was widely criticised and lost a lot of legitimacy because of the perceived slow pace of progress (see Lemay-Hébert 2009, for example). Local communities and governments may also judge progress based upon quantifiable outputs rather than less tangible – and, therefore, it is often assumed, less credible or, at least, less objective – indicators, even if their own experience of security may be at odds with statistical data.

Additionally, while it is often assumed that local ownership is a principle often disregarded by external actors due to their own perceptions about the ease with which it can be facilitated or the ramifications of pursuing it, it can also be local actors who advocate for increased control by external or international actors (see Krogstad 2013). This is particularly the case where there is limited trust and confidence in political leaders, for instance, or where people may fear the consequences of greater ownership, particularly where security conditions remain of concern. For instance, political leaders may want increased external control in order to relinquish responsibility for difficult decisions, have reforms pushed through that are unpopular with the electorate, or sustain donor support and to 'keep domestic rivals weak', as was the case in Sierra Leone (Krogstad 2013: 10).

Conversely, local actors may also resist reform or lack the political will to engage in reform efforts. This is especially the case with SSR, which can significantly curtail the power of dominant and elite groups in society (see Heupel 2012; Gordon 2011; Berg 2012). There is

therefore a recognised risk that local actors can hijack or thwart SSR processes for their own agendas and undermine a fragile peace (Hänggi 2009), which can limit the extent to which local ownership is promoted by external actors. Local actors may also disagree with some of the core principles of SSR, outside local ownership, such as the need for security structures to be affordable, publically accountable, responsive to the needs of the people, and representative of them. As Donais (2009) asks, what if local norms and cultures promote principles dissimilar to Western liberal ideas of security governance? For instance, what if women or other marginalised groups risk being further marginalised or victimised by a process led by those in male–dominated political and security structures? This can lend itself to limiting the level and type of local engagement.

As Bakr (2011) has highlighted with respect to SSR in countries in the Arab region, for instance, there are often cultural and political constraints, including prevailing gender stereotypes and discrimination, which contribute to viewing women as lacking the necessary attributes and skills to work in the security sector. Gender stereotypes and discrimination also contribute to the prevalence of gender-based violence which afflicts women and girls and which is rarely prioritised by security sector institutions. Lack of representation in the security sector, and the prevalence of gender-based violence, demand the active engagement of women and the mainstreaming of gender issues in reform processes (Bakr 2011). This, however, may be unlikely if reform processes are led by those in male-dominated political and security structures.

There can also be limited acceptance that former enemy combatants can work together in the same security institutions, or that those who only have experience in guerrilla forces or non-state armed groups rather than in state security institutions are able to develop the skill-set required for integration in the state security structure. This can potentially threaten the peace process, as was the case in Nepal, for instance. Here there was lack of agreement on the integration of some of the former Maoist People's Liberation Army (PLA) combatants into state security agencies, despite integration being an element of the Comprehensive Peace Accord. As a result, many former PLA combatants spent many years in cantonment camps (see ICG 2011).

Similarly, there can be lack of acceptance of the need for oversight and civilian control of security institutions. For instance, generating agreement to the principle of democratic control of the armed forces in Nepal was problematic, not least because of concerns about political interference, and lack of civilian experience and expertise in defence matters (see ICG 2011; Saubhagya 2009). Likewise, in Guinea-Bissau, senior military officers were opposed to SSR and democratic control of the armed forces, which undermined efforts to reform the security sector and build sustainable peace (IRIN 2013; ICG 2012).

The concept of developing affordable security institutions is also often problematic, particularly because it generally entails downsizing or right-sizing (ISSR 2006; Hänggi 2009). In Kosovo, for example, it was difficult for many Kosovo Albanians to accept that those who had fought to liberate Kosovo in the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) would not have a place in the future army of an independent Kosovo. For instance, oftentimes, at least

in the beginning of the process to establish the subsequent Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) and, later, the Kosovo Security Force (KSF), the symbolic importance of security structures outweighed issues of affordability and capability (see Qehaja 2009; KIPRED 2007; SSR 2006). Compounding these sensitivities was the perceived need on the part of the international community to clearly divorce the KSF from the KPC and, particularly, its KLA heritage, not least to distance future security structures from associations with terrorism and to increase the likelihood of ethnic minority Kosovo Serbs applying to join the institution.

These examples suggest that operationalising full and immediate local ownership of SSR can undermine other SSR principles and the extent to which the security structure will ultimately be responsive to the needs of the state and its people. It is, as such, necessary to recognise that it can take time to build awareness of some of the fundamental principles inherent to SSR. Operationalising full and immediate local ownership of SSR can also potentially disrupt a fragile peace, particularly where seismic power shifts continue, such as post-conflict Kosovo when its future status remained unresolved or Nepal which experienced persistent political deadlock.

As argued by Narten (2009) and others (such as Donais 2009), effective interventions and sustainable peace are not predicated upon immediate and full local ownership, but the risks of delaying full ownership by local actors need to be attended to. It is also necessary to acknowledge that the West does not have exclusive understanding of how peace can be built (see Cubitt 2013; Liden, Mac Ginty and Richmond 2009). Consequently, while issues concerning affordability, good governance, demographic representation, and the protection of the rights of minority and marginalised groups are critical to the development of a democratic security sector, issues of less strategic importance should not delay the transfer of decision-making authority to local actors. This is even if decisions reached on these and other matters are different to those that would have been reached by external actors: for results are irrelevant if they are not sustainable (Nathan 2007; OECD 2009).

In addition to remaining attentive to risks associated with minimal or delayed local ownership and flexible regarding the perceived skills required to drive the reform process, part of the answer lies in viewing SSR as a long-term process - one that is instrumental to its outcome and sustainability (see Nathan 2007; Sedra 2010b; Keane and Downes 2012). 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 institutions that are constructed or reformed (Nathan 2007; Panarelli 2010). The process is one that involves partnership, dialogue and mutual respect between external and internal actors (see Sedra 2010b; Nathan 2007; Brahimi 2007; UN 2012, for instance). This should entail enhancing mutual capacity and will. It should also involve mentoring and providing advice in order that the political and organisational change challenges are addressed (OECD 2009). The process should also ensure that those whose voices are often ignored, and whose security is often most threatened, are able to inform decisions about future secure structures, policies and priorities. There is also a need to recognise that the post-conflict environment poses a problem for local ownership, not least in terms of shifting power relations, unresolved grievances, heightened tension and animosity between groups,

and weak, corrupt or otherwise illegitimate state structures. This is compounded by a conceptual ambiguity regarding the concept of local ownership (simply put, exactly who does what and when) and flawed assumptions that 'locals' are a homogenous whole with shared interests and that 'local ownership' is something that is given (by external actors to passive recipients) rather than taken.

What is required is clarification of what is meant by local ownership and the provision of more guidance in terms of how it can be effectively operationalised – recognising the nuances of who should be involved in what and to what extent, and how these change over time and place (see Mobekk 2010). In order to begin to respond to these needs, the next section of this article will reflect upon who is local and what is owned, before considering how SSR programmes can be more genuinely locally-owned.

Defining and Operationalising Local Ownership

Despite the prominence of the principle of local ownership, it remains unclear specifically who the locals are (Mobekk 2010; Scheye and Peake 2005; Donais 2009;). Nonetheless, it is widely understood that SSR processes should be inclusive, people-centred and context-specific (UN 2008; OECD 2007). It might, therefore, be assumed that the locals do not just encompass political elites or representatives at the level of the state. In fact, the UN Secretary-General (UNSG), in his report on the role of the UN in supporting SSR, said 'security sector reform can succeed only if it is 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). In a more recent report to the Security Council, the UNSG urged Member States to 'apply a holistic, participatory and transparent approach to security sector reform, based on an inclusive dialogue process among and between authorities at various levels, from all branches of government and security sector institutions, national human rights institutions, civil society, especially women's groups and child protection advocates, and other non-State actors, while continuing to reflect and reinforce the host Government's primary role' (UN 2013: 21).

Indeed, exclusive focus on political elites and state-level authorities can undermine the extent to which SSR programmes are locally owned (given power is rarely willingly relinquished) and, ultimately, successful and sustainable (Oosterveld and Galand 2012; Scheye 2008; Samuels 2010). This is particularly the case in many 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). Consequently, pursuit of SSR programmes that are owned by national authorities may also, paradoxically, compromise the extent to which ownership and control is divested to the community level

(Oosterveld and Galand 2012; Hendrickson 2010) and ultimately the extent to which security and justice at the community level are enhanced (Donais 2009).

Choosing from a broad scope of prospective local owners can also help identify more committed and more effective drivers of the reform process. This is particularly so 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 Heupel 2012for instance). Moreover, without representation from a broad cross-section of society throughout the SSR process, it is not likely that future security structures will able to respond to the security needs and concerns of that broad cross-section. Consequently, security institutions will be unlikely to be able to solicit the public support and trust that is key to an effective security sector. The legitimacy and accountability of these institutions will also suffer. This will, ultimately, hinder efforts to promote security and justice and, as a result, sustainable peace.

However, efforts to promote local ownership by external actors are often focussed on the security and political elite (Mobekk 2010; Caparini 2010). Local ownership 'often ignores ownership by the general population and overlooks countrywide diversity' (Baker 2010: 213). Moreover, as Mobekk argues, in practice local ownership is often reduced 'to consultation with the political and security sector leadership' (Mobekk 2010: 231). Representatives of civil society tend to be engaged in a much more sporadic, less encompassing and less meaningful way, often constituting little more than initial consultation and infrequent dialogue (Capairini 2010).

As an example, the Kosovo Internal Security Sector Review (ISSR 2006), conducted in 2005 by the British Security Sector Development Advisory Team (SSDAT) at the request of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), constituted an impressive effort to ensure future SSR in Kosovo was developed on the basis of the security needs and concerns as articulated by people at the community level (OECD 2007). However, there were questions raised regarding the extent of that consultation (see Saferworld and Forum for Civic Initiatives 2007). Moreover, the formal SSR process, from inception, prioritised the voices of lead external actors. After a time, these lead external actors were joined by like-minded (Sedra 2010b), central-level local actors from the political and security arena who could be relied upon to deliver the vision as originally articulated by lead external actors, or, to put it another way, who would take 'ownership of "our" ideas' (Surke 2007: 1292). Voices at the community level featured much less prominently in discussions or decision-making forums in Kosovo (Jackson 2011). Similarly, in Timor-Leste, Iraq and Somalia, for example, while the international community engaged local elites, the majority of the population were marginalised from SSR processes (Jackson 2010 and 2011).

This is not uncommon in security-related areas of peacebuilding, particularly defence reform, which can be insular (DCAF 2008) and reserved for those who are perceived to have the requisite expertise, as mentioned earlier. There is also often a misguided concern that transparency can compromise operational security and, thus, the operational effectiveness of the armed forces and so information should be shared only on a 'need to know' basis (see

Gordon 2010a). 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 2008a: 284). More broadly, non-state local actors are considered to be only 'marginally relevant to the core concerns of SSR' and are generally perceived to be 'unwieldy as a constituency' (Donais 2009: 123). It can, therefore, be concluded that the returns of bringing non-state actors to the table are not worth the investment, given perceptions of their relevance and significance, and the difficulties in engaging them in the process.

However, limiting the engagement in decisions in SSR to external actors and amenable, local security and political elites can have serious consequences for the capability of security sector institutions. As Caparini argues, excluding civil society from SSR undermines the principle of democratic governance as well as the long-term goals of creating 'legitimate, responsive and publicly accountable security systems' (Caparini 2010: 244). Empowering civil society to potentially challenge the state and its institutions is not destabilising, as might be feared: as Cubitt argues, 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). Efforts to promote co-ordination and coherence and to reach consensus among actors may be more problematic with the engagement of civil society and the wider general public in SSR processes, particularly given that locals are not a homogenous whole and do not share the same security and justice needs (Mobekk 2010; UN 2008; Ebo 2007). However, building democratic institutions is about constructing systems and processes that enable disparate voices to be heard rather than limiting them (see Cubitt 2013; Nathan 2007). It is precisely because society is heterogeneous that voices representing various groups across society need to be heard in any peacebuilding process if it is to stand a chance of success. The complexity of SSR cannot be resolved by ignoring disparate voices: the exact opposite must occur if SSR is to be successful. Mechanisms need to be created to enable the incorporation of the voices of different local actors in the SSR process (see Nathan 2007; Benedix and Stanley 2008). Compromising sustainability and the democratic process in favour of apparent quick-wins and neat solutions is either short-sighted or imperialistic in intent, unnecessarily and paradoxically prolonging the presence of external actors (see Cubitt 2013; Nathan 2007; Narten 2009).

Actively engaging civil society and people at the community level in SSR can also alleviate some of the concerns regarding the threat of spoilers if local ownership is broadened beyond 'a narrow set of like-minded elites' (Sedra 2010b: 8). Spoilers that threaten a fragile peace are less likely to be successful where civil society is robust, and where people feel as if they are contributing to decisions about their future. Where there is dialogue there will be less alienation, less frustration and, therefore, less potential for spoilers to exploit (see Narten 2009). It may also be important to facilitate the engagement of potential or perceived spoilers, not least so that they can voice concerns or opposition in open, legitimate forums (see Nathan 2007) and so pose less of a threat to the reform and broader peace processes. Disregarding the principle of local ownership based upon fear of empowering potential spoilers of the peace process is counter-productive and, as Narten (2009) advocates, supporting the development of a robust civil society and its ownership of reform processes can help alleviate some of

these potential risks. Limiting local engagement to like-minded elite groups also risks overlooking 'important forms of local influence' (Krogstad 2013: 6) and therefore opportunities to help build a sustainable peace.

While it is vital to actively engage civil society and people at the community level in SSR, it must not be assumed that people within demographic groups at the community level always share the same interests and needs. While, clearly, the interests of political and security elite groups are not always aligned to the interests of groups at the community level, people within demographic groups at the community level can have disparate needs and concerns. Particularly when considering security and justice needs, it is important to distinguish between those who may be dominant and those who may be marginalised within a community or demographic group (Mobekk 2010). Consequently, it is insufficient to actively engage specific civil society organisations or specific representatives of certain communities without considering the extent to which they represent their communities and the power dynamics within those communities. This is particularly necessary so that the specific security needs and concerns of the most vulnerable and marginalised members of society are not overlooked, including the needs and concerns of women, children, disabled people, the displaced, the elderly, the terminally ill or infirm, ethnic and religious minorities, lower castes, the homeless and the poor. It is important to remember that the vulnerable in post-conflict environments are often those who suffer the greatest threat of violence, injustice and human rights violations (see UN 2004, for instance). It is, therefore, imperative, that those who may most require the services provided by security sector institutions have their security needs considered in any reform process. In order to do so, their active involvement in SSR processes is needed and their voices must be heard.

It is also important to engage civil society and people at the community level throughout the SSR process, rather than just at the beginning or once key decisions have been reached, for instance. This is because security concerns and needs change over time and because decisions at various points in the design and implementation stages can have a significant and long-lasting impact on people's security. While local ownership can never be simply translated as possession, given the initiative and funding for programmes generally comes from external actors (Krogstad 2013; Scheye 2008), it should mean more than occasional consultation or 'buy-in' (Mobekk 2010). It should mean that SSR programmes are 'designed, managed and implemented by local actors rather than external actors' (Nathan 2007: 4) and that those local actors include 'all relevant stakeholders' (DCAF/ISSAT 2012: 7). The nature of the involvement will, to some extent, depend upon the specific stakeholder and, of course, the particular context (see Mobekk 2010). However, the needs and concerns of all stakeholders should be able to find expression in the process and inform reform decisions, with the result that SSR outcomes are broadly owned by local actors across society (see Narten 2009). The outcomes will not be locally owned unless decisions – regarding security threats, structures, policies, priorities, processes, and so on – throughout the SSR process have been determined by local actors and informed by all key stakeholders. So, while local ownership can be considered to be evolutionary (Mobekk 2010), changing over time and in different contexts, and rarely considered in 'binary, either/or terms' (Donais 2008b: 4), inclusive, active engagement by local actors throughout the SSR process is required if there is to be local

ownership of the SSR outcomes. Without this, the outcomes will not be sustainable as there will be little commitment to the security sector institutions and, without broad local community engagement in the process, little public trust and confidence in these institutions. Without the requisite political will and public support any achievements made during the SSR process will be undermined and prospects for a sustainable peace will, ultimately, be threatened. In sum, ownership should constitute ownership of the processes and the outcomes: it should comprise active engagement in the SSR process from inception through design and implementation, where active engagement means participation in decision-making processes, and it should result in security and justice sector institutions which are accountable to and responsive to the needs of the people.

Such inclusive, active engagement in the SSR process can proceed alongside efforts to build capacity, to reach consensus between groups with competing interests, and to reconcile local norms and values with international human rights, rule of law and democratic norms and values, upon which SSR is predicated (see Donais 2008a; Jackson 2011; Sedra 2010b). The process of negotiation and building capacity and awareness should not be restricted to security and political elites. 'Civic empowerment' (DCAF/ISSAT 2012) should be a key aim of SSR, to enable full and active engagement of communities in the SSR process, and also to address Security Sector Governance (SSG) requirements while building the capacity of effective civil society oversight of the security sector.

Community Engagement

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 predominantly top-down, state-centric approach that has dominated SSR to date (Baker and Scheye 2007; Caparini 2010; Jackson 2011). It is 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 SSR programmes. These structures should be incorporated into SSR programmes from the 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.

Incorporating such structures into SSR programmes can highlight the fact that the security needs as articulated at the community level are sometimes quite different to the security needs identified by central-level and external actors. For example, after the immediate aftermath of conflict in Kosovo and Nepal, concerns about socio-economic hardships tended to overshadow more publicly-prominent concerns about territorial security and public safety, at least among majority populations (Gordon 2010b; Gordon, Sharma, Forbes and Cave 2011; ISSR 2006; DCAF 2009). Taking measures to ensure SSR processes are informed by the needs and concerns of people at the community level can, of course, help increase the likelihood that these needs and concerns will be attended to and, thus, contribute to the peacebuilding process. Such structures can also help develop consensus on security issues. If

these structures are incorporated into SSR processes, they can also help to build relationships between groups as well as between the state and its people, and thus contribute to reconciliation and peacebuilding at the community level and beyond.

Such structures exist in many post-conflict countries (Bastick and Whitman 2013; van Tongeren 2013). They are sometimes referred to as district or provincial security committees, community safety councils, local security forums or citizen security councils, for example (Bastick and Whitman 2013). Examples can be found in the local security committees established by women's community support organisations in Haiti (Bastick and Whitman 2013); Local Security Councils in Columbia and Guatemala (Barnes and Albrecht 2008); and the community-based approaches to building safety and security developed in the Balkans by 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). These community-based approaches have since extended to other conflict-affected and conflict-vulnerable environments including Nepal, South Sudan and Kenya (Donnelly, Nikolla, Poudel and Chakraborty 2013).

However, while there are some examples of community safety structures that engage local communities in decisions about their own security, these structures are rarely integrated into formal SSR processes, at least not at the early stages of SSR when key decisions are made about security priorities and subsequent capability requirements. Developing or supporting community safety structures are also rarely prioritised either by host governments or the international community, which tend to view security issues as a matter for discussion among security professionals, experts and elites, primarily at the level of the state. Efforts to solicit opinions on security matters from people at the community level are generally infrequent and sporadic, as has been mentioned. They are rarely developed into structures and processes which put people at the community level at the heart of SSR, which would ensure that they can be actively engaged in SSR processes and inform decisions about their own security (see Nathan 2007).

It is argued that where they do not exist in conflict-affected environments – or exist in embryonic, piecemeal or fractured form – development of community safety structures and direct engagement in SSR processes should be supported. Where possible, their development in the early stages of SSR should be supported so that decisions about security priorities and future structures and processes are informed by the views of those at the community level. Support of their early development could, in fact, be viewed as one of the first fundamental steps in the SSR process and certainly one that paves the way towards substantive and inclusive local ownership and, thus, towards successful SSR. It can also be a means to promote wider engagement in and, thus, a commitment to peacebuilding processes. Parallels can be drawn with local peace committees (LPCs) and the value they can have in peacebuilding efforts, especially if they are incorporated in to so-called infrastructures for peace (I4P) (see van Tongeren 2013). It is suggested that early development of community safety structures should include development of the necessary legislative framework and decisions about how community safety structures may be connected to state-level Ministries and other bodies. This is required for oversight, budgetary and co-ordination purposes, and to

enable integration with SSR processes. It is also to ensure community-level initiatives receive the support and information they need, and to enable state-level policy to be informed by community-level security concerns and priorities. In Kosovo, for instance, early and expeditious development of the legislative and structural framework for the community safety architecture, including the definition of central-level management and oversight responsibilities, could have tied into predominantly state-level negotiations regarding future security institutions. This could have created an effective mechanism for the public to inform and, in turn, be informed about decisions reached in the development of the broader security sector, including the creation of new state-level security institutions. While early formalisation of the relationship between community safety structures and state-level bodies is recommended, in many places the formalisation may be revisited, of course, as decisions about the security sector are taken and institutions are constructed or reformed.

However, there are risks and limitations to consider in respect of supporting the establishment and/or integration of community safety structures into formal SSR processes. Outside issues of funding, co-ordination, public awareness and political will, chief among these is to recognise that community safety structures frequently reflect and reinforce the power relations of the wider society. They can, therefore, marginalise or exclude those groups that may be more vulnerable to security threats or injustices (see Gordon, Sharma, Forbes and Cave 2011; Jackson 2011 and 2010). Such risks and limitations need to be taken into account in order to ensure that the security concerns and needs of the most vulnerable are attended to, particularly because vulnerable groups (including women) are often marginalised in SSR processes (see Salahub and Nerland 2010). It is also important to avoid imposing a template of community safety structures onto places without due regard for the context, to avoid undermining efforts to promote security and wasting valuable resources (Blease and Qehaja 2013). As much as possible, the development of such structures should driven by local communities with the support and engagement of others where required. There are also risks of incorporating community safety structures into formal SSR processes associated with undermining the very value of such structures by institutionalising and co-opting them under state-level control, where the power of bottom-up, community-based approaches are usurped and serve merely to add legitimacy to top-down, state-centric dynamics (Gordon 2010b).

Conclusion

This article has argued that supporting and engaging community safety structures from the planning and design stages of SSR, throughout implementation and thereafter – while remaining attentive to the limitations and challenges involved – can help to create a security sector that is responsive to the needs of the people and one that enjoys their trust and confidence. It can also help generate a robust civil society and a citizenry that is knowledgeable about security matters and that can influence decisions about their own security. This could enhance security sector responsiveness and accountability as well as build domestic capacity to enable the successful and timely departure of an international presence. It can also build relationships between the state and its people which are so often

overlooked in SSR and statebuilding endeavours (Jackson 2010 and 2011; Andersen 2012). In so doing, it can help build state legitimacy and resilience. SSR programmes are, therefore, more likely to be context-specific, people-centred and locally owned – as intended – and, therefore, more likely to be successful. As a result, the prospects of building a sustainable peace are likely to be considerably higher.

Engaging people at the community level in such processes can be costly, take time and carry risks. SSR and wider peacebuilding processes should be seen, however, as complex and long-term processes, and as processes which are instrumental to SSR outcomes. It is argued that if SSR and wider peacebuilding efforts are to be successful it is vitally important to ensure civil society and the wider public comprise the 'local' that should 'own' the processes and outcomes of SSR. Continued focus on top-down approaches and a narrow interpretation of who should be actively engaged in SSR processes does not, as appears to be widely considered, build state resilience, avoid the risks associated with multi-actor co-ordination, or expedite the reform process. Rather, state resilience, an effective security sector, and a sustainable peace are all, in large part, built upon the extent to which people can influence decisions that will shape their security and their futures.

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