

THE MISSING PIECE IN SECURITY SECTOR REFORM: LESSONS FROM THE **DEMOCRATIC**

REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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Search for Common Ground

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Search for Common Ground in Democratic Republic of Congo

Search for Common Ground has implemented programs in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2001 with the overall objective to strengthen peace in the DRC by transforming the behavior of both key stakeholders and the general population at the national, provincial, and community levels. Search works across all levels of society to support diverse and constructive dialogue, positive peace-focused media, and good governance. Search partners with and engage local actors including civil society organizations, women's groups, youth, media professionals, and others through participatory action-research, media tools, innovative theater programs, acclaimed mobile cinema sessions, capacity building for key stakeholders, community engagement, public dialogue around governance and democracy, mediation, and reconciliation. Search then connects local-level initiatives and expertise with national and international policymakers and experts to ensure that local voices and local solutions are at the forefront of decision-making.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How can Security Sector Reform (SSR) ensure protection of civilians by security forces who themselves work for a fragile state? This has been the challenge faced by a multitude of policymakers, donors, and field-based implementers in efforts to successfully reform the security sector of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

In situations of deep crises of state legitimacy and entrenched hostility between citizen and state, like in the DRC, SSR initiatives risk reinforcing patterns of dysfunctional, weak, unrepresentative, or ineffective government by strengthening those forces without considering their relationship to society more broadly. Over time, such SSR approaches can all too easily undermine the very security they were intended to provide.

This brief reviews the diverse and distinct efforts which have been undertaken in the domain of SSR and draws three key lessons and recommendations. It is informed by [a 10-year case study of security sector interventions in the DRC](#). While the DRC is a complex case, the insights it produces can be of use both in the DRC itself, particularly as the government continues to grapple with this challenge, and in other fragile states faced with the challenge of SSR as a pathway to improved civilian protection and strengthened state legitimacy. Three key insights emerge from this review:

1. **“Train and equip” approaches to SSR are insufficient on their own, particularly given the weaknesses of the state apparatus.**
2. **Despite their accountability to the political leadership of the state, security forces are not monolithic, but rather composed of many units and individuals. There are multiple avenues for engagement and SSR efforts should look to identify and amplify champions from within.**
3. **Putting the relationship between citizens and their security forces at the heart of the SSR effort has been proven to achieve results in civilian protection, adoption of human rights-sensitive behavior by security forces, and reform from the bottom-up and within the security sector.**

This briefing offers recommendations of how to engage communities together with security forces in a bottom-up approach. It illustrates the role that social norms and behavior change incentives can play within SSR. And while recognizing the short-term imperatives which often drive SSR in post-conflict environments, it highlights the need for a longer-term framing of the transformation needed to enable SSR to strengthen security forces' ability to protect their communities.

REVIEW OF SSR APPROACHES IN DRC

Security Sector Reform (SSR)¹ has been a central aspiration of DRC's government and international partners since the end of the Congo wars in 2003. While conflict dynamics and country contexts vary widely, the significant effort and investment in SSR in the DRC over 15 years offers insights and lessons on ways to improve civilian-security relationships in Congo and beyond.



"I am waiting to talk about reform, but nothing is done apart from training on how we should do the work, reform insists on this, without giving us the possibility of doing it." – member of the Congolese military²

The challenge at hand

DRC's two wars between 1996 and 2003 were characterized by a litany of abuses against civilians and the almost complete collapse of the Congolese state. From the colonial era to the rule of President Mobutu (1965-1997),³ the police, military, and justice systems were run to protect the elite.⁴ Under Mobutu, the military viewed the civilian population as a 'field to harvest from' and civilians perceived the military as an agent of repression not protection.⁵ By 2003, decades of conflict, entrenched corruption, and mismanagement had left the Congolese security sector both extremely weak and locked in an antagonistic relationship with civilians, who were the frequent targets of abuse from security forces.⁶

When DRC's wars ended in 2003, the country was faced with dual security challenges. On the one hand, tens of thousands of former combatants were to be formally integrated into one national security force. Former security forces, as well as a large number of untrained former members of rebel and militia groups, were mixed piecemeal into new units.⁷ Many of these former rebel and militia members remained functionally loyal to their wartime chains of command. Police and soldiers frequently went unpaid,⁸ and abuses against

1 There are many definitions of SSR, but the basic concept is '...often used to refer to the process through which a country seeks to review and enhance the effectiveness and the accountability of its security and justice providers.' Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, "SSR in a Nutshell: Manual For Introductory Training on Security Sector Reform," <https://issat.dcaf.ch/content/download/2970/25352/file/ISSAT%20LEVEL%201%20TRAINING%20MANUAL%20-%20SSR%20IN%20A%20NUTSHELL%20-%20205.2.pdf>.

2 Interview, Congolese military actor.

3 Crawford Young and Thomas Edwin Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*, 1985; Michael G. Schatzberg, *The Dialectics of Oppression in Zaire*, 1988.

4 Boshoff et al, "Supporting SSR in the DRC: Between a Rock and a Hard Place," April 2010.

5 Judith Verweijen, *The Ambiguity of Militarization*, August 2015.

6 Under Mobutu, the military saw the civilian population as a 'field to harvest from' and were an agent of repression not protection. Judith Verweijen, *The Ambiguity of Militarization*, August 2015; Crawford Young and Thomas Edwin Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*, 1985; Michael G. Schatzberg, *The Dialectics of Oppression in Zaire*, 1988.

7 Pamphile Sebahara, «La Réforme Du Secteur De La Sécurité En RD Congo,» March 13, 2006.

8 George Berghezan, "Forces Armées de RDC: Le chaos institutionnalisé?," January 9, 2014.

civilians were rife.⁹ On the other hand, despite the end of civil war, a mosaic of armed groups remained active throughout the country and numerous Congolese and foreign armed groups continued to resist the government, which lacked effective tools to defeat them.¹⁰

SSR offered the potential to tackle both challenges at the same time: create a cohesive security sector that was accountable to civilian authorities and respectful of the rule of law and build a security sector that was able to defend the national territory and its people from national security threats. SSR efforts¹¹ were intended to equip the post-conflict state with the tools to effectively protect civilians, re-extend state authority, and prevent further violence.

Three key tactics

To achieve these goals, the majority of SSR initiatives undertaken since 2003 have been technical interventions that have followed three broad templates:¹²

1. **Train and equip** approaches that sought to directly enhance the capacity, provide resources, and improve the effectiveness of a historically underfunded Congolese police and military, now containing tens of thousands of untrained personnel.¹³
2. **Institutional reforms** that sought to address the structural factors that undermine discipline, command coherence, and control. These included high-level collaboration on strategic reform plans to clarify and harmonize command structures, a comprehensive census of serving personnel, strengthened payroll systems, and the ad hoc construction of new barracks, training centers, and armories.¹⁴

9 These abuses were reported by numerous organizations, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, UN agencies and others – for instance, in 2007 Amnesty International reported that most human rights violations in the DRC were attributable to the army, and, increasingly, the police; Amnesty International, “Democratic Republic of Congo: Torture and Killing by State Security Agents Still Endemic,” October 2007 <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/60000/afr620122007en.pdf>. Though no definitive national figures are available, local reports make clear the scale of the problem – Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported 620 rapes by men in uniform between July 2003 and April 2004 in the town of Baraka, South Kivu; Edward B. Rackley, «Predatory Governance in the DRC: Civilian Impact and Humanitarian Response,» March 2005, <https://odihpn.org/magazine/predatory-governance-in-the-drc-civilian-impact-and-humanitarian-response/>.

10 There were a large number of armed groups, many of which changed name and structure regularly – it is not possible to give a definitive list. 10 armed groups were signatories to the Global and All Inclusive Accord that put the 2003 – 2006 transition in place. By 2008, the Congolese government signed a peace deal with a further 22, though some were successors, remnants or splinters of pre-existing groups. The most important foreign groups were the FDLR, remnants of the forces that carried out the Rwandan genocide which had moved into what became Congolese territory in 1994, Ugandan-linked group the ADF-NALU and, from 2005, the Lord’s Resistance Army of Joseph Kony.

11 In the DRC, the primary initial challenge was bringing together tens of thousands of former combatants into new police and military units, including many with no formal training, in an environment where the existing security structures were extremely weak, command and control fractured, and with an embedded culture of predation. See ‘SSR Strategy Document’ for more detail on the range of approaches taken to address these challenges. “DRC: SSR Technical Strategy Document,” Search for Common Ground, 2017, https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Search-DRC-SSR_Technical_Strategy_Document.pdf.

12 Ibid.

13 Such interventions were carried out by a wide range of bilateral and multilateral actors, delivered according to a series of piecemeal bilateral deals between the Congolese government and national donors, taking place between 2003 and the present – though much bilateral training has been suspended in recent years. Military training has been undertaken by the EU and UN, as well as 14 bilateral state actors including South Africa, China, Angola, France, Belgium, the US and others. Police training has been carried out by the UN – UNDP and UNPOL – Angola, France, the EU, Japan, Germany and the UK and others.

14 The most high-profile initiatives were undertaken by the EU via the EUSEC and EUPOL programs, along with collective and informal international community participation in the formulation of high-level strategic reform plans. Another approach has been to build or refurbish facilities. The EUSEC and EUPOL programs undertook a census, substantially computerized the military human resource system and handed

3. **Civilian accountability and oversight** efforts that were designed to create demand for better behavior from security actors, notably the police.¹⁵ Such approaches included community policing initiatives in target provinces that coincided with train and equip efforts for local police units, as well as enhanced internal oversight mechanisms, improved external accountability via civil society, communities, the justice system, media, and elected bodies.¹⁶

Challenges to technical SSR approaches

Fifteen years into SSR efforts in DRC, it is clear that these technical approaches to SSR have largely been unsuccessful in building an effective or accountable security sector in the DRC. The UN reported that 54% of all documented human rights abuses in the country between 2014 and March 2016 had been carried out by state agents.¹⁷ Deep patterns of corruption, patronage, and impunity, embedded in both the security sector and wider political and governance structures, continue to block or undermine reform efforts. One international observer assessed that much of the formal security governance structure had been set up – legislation, organization and formal command and control – but that it fell apart at times of crisis.¹⁸ As François Misser wrote with regard to SSR in DRC, “...few countries have received as much foreign technical assistance for such disastrous results.”¹⁹

Each of the approaches outlined in the previous section faced challenges along the way, as reflected in several formal and informal evaluations of SSR initiatives in the DRC.²⁰ Some of the most frequently cited challenges include:

1. First amongst the challenges is a **lack of coordination** among donors, agencies, and NGOs,²¹ who

over databases of police and military personnel to the Congolese authorities, issued ID cards, and worked to guard the ‘chain of payments’ in order to prevent salaries being embezzled.

15 DFID cancelled its police reform program in 2015. The Konrad Adenauer Foundation was working with PNC and FARDC on gender, human rights and political education, as well as with SECAS, but put all of its work on hold in 2016. SSR work continues under the umbrella of I4S continues in its target provinces, aligned to a stabilization logic, to which SFCCG’s work has been aligned (see below). MONUSCO’s current mandate emphasizes that it ‘...aims at reinforcing the will of the Congolese Government and at encouraging the participation of civil society in the SSR process in order to ensure local ownership of the reform.’ Search has continued to support the PNC in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri.

16 Though some elements – such as supporting the creation of Local Security Committees – are similar to those of community-led approaches, explored below, it differs through seeking improved security outcomes via enhanced oversight, judicial discipline or demands from civil society. This risks emphasising divisions – and tensions – between civilians and security actors, rather than as interdependent and facing common problems. For instance, a review of one of the most significant programs that took this approach, the Security Sector Accountability and Police Reform Program (SSAPR), funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) described it as ‘...tackling the “demand side” of the problem, working with citizens, government institutions, and elected representatives to ensure that the security and justice sectors are responsive and accountable to the people they are meant to serve.’ “Democratic Republic of the Congo—Security Sector Accountability and Police Reform Programme (SSAPR),” 2015, <https://www.dai.com/our-work/projects/democratic-republic-congo-security-sector-accountability-and-police-reform>.

17 *Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses in the DRC: Achievements, Challenges and Way Forward*, UNJHRO, October 2016, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CD/UNJHROAccountabiliteReport2016_en.pdf.

18 Interview, international diplomat.

19 François Misser, “Rogue Army for a Fragile State,” Medium, January 29, 2015, <https://medium.com/africa-in-fact/rogue-army-for-a-fragile-state-441103559600>.

20 See, for instance, Eastern Congo Initiative, “The DRC: Taking a Stand on Security Sector Reform,” April 2012; Oxfam America, “No Will, No Way: US Funded Security Sector Reform in the DRC,” November 23, 2010.

21 Dylan Hendrickson and Missak Kasongo, “Security Sector Reform in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Strategic Issues,” 2009; Nicola Dahrendorf, “MONUC and the Relevance of Coherent Mandates: The Case of the DRC,” 2008.

often use incompatible or insufficient approaches.²² For instance, military units were trained and equipped by different bilateral donors with incompatible doctrines and institutional structures, which undermined cohesion and the function of bodies working within the military to build a new collective ethos and approach.²³

2. SSR efforts in DRC have also **focused on the provision of material resources or technical assistance without rigorous assessment of the local capacity** to use new facilities or sustain change.²⁴ Training on legal rights and responsibilities has taken priority over meeting basic needs of soldiers and police themselves – one Congolese security actor described it as “training on something that doesn’t exist.”²⁵
3. Many SSR programs have been **short-term**, seeking visible quick wins over meaningful long-term change, or were abandoned to avoid the reputational risk of remaining associated with dysfunctional security actors.
4. In some cases, train and equip approaches have led to newly equipped military units more effectively combating non-state armed groups, notably in taking on the M23 rebel group.²⁶ In other instances, such units have **used their “enhanced techniques” for personal interests**, against civilians or in support of a particular political constituency.
5. Institutional reform efforts have led to improvements in systems, including personnel management, career progression and recruitment, salary payments, and command structures. Yet some institutional reforms have been **subverted by entrenched patronage networks or have been poorly adapted to Congolese circumstances**. For example, an effort to support reliable salary payments required that soldiers be paid directly from bank accounts; however, many soldiers were deployed in rural areas without access to banks. In these cases, they were only able to access their money by traveling back to a major city, sometimes spending more than their monthly salary on travel to access the banks.

Reformers have repeatedly cited a “lack of political will” as the key obstacle to progress.²⁷ This can be misleading, by suggesting that the DRC’s leaders are disengaged from policy issues. Rather, it may be argued that the difficulties of successful reform stem from an *excess* of political will – a will rooted in a robust and deeply entrenched system of patronage, linked to the political economy, and threatened by what successful reform would bring. Some have argued that the Kinshasa elite continued to view a professional army as a potential

22 Caty Clément, “Security Sector Reform in the DRC: Forward to the Past,” 2009.

23 Notably SECAS, *the Services d’Education Civique, Patriotique et d’Action Social* within the FARDC.

24 Hoffmann et al, “Multi-layered Security Governance as a Quick Fix?” July 2016.

25 Interview, Congolese security actor.

26 Belgian trained rapid-response brigades were highlighted in interviews with international observers as having been extremely important to the victory over the M23. *Armée révolutionnaire du Congo*, more commonly known as M23, is a rebel military group based in eastern areas of the DRC. They are made up of fighters who deserted the Congolese army in 2012, and are majority ethnically Tutsi. Interview, international official, 2017.

27 Eastern Congo Initiative, “The DRC: Taking a Stand on Security Sector Reform,” April 2012; Oxfam America, “No Will, No Way: US Funded Security Sector Reform in the DRC,” November 23, 2010.

threat to their power,²⁸ and, as a result, the “...authorities have preferred organized insecurity to the organization of security.”²⁹



“How can you expect a better result from police who are not trained or paid? It’s like a hoping for a good result from surgery done by a fraudulent, untrained doctor, with no equipment or support; it’s the illusion of security sector reform.” – Congolese security actor³⁰

From within the security forces, there is a similar perception that much of SSR shies away from substantial systemic reform. Interviews with security actors have consistently identified the pervasive system of clientelism³¹ as a major impediment to change. As one security actor put it, they wished to see donors and international agencies “help change the security system already in place.”³² Another security actor stated, ‘the international community has forgotten its role,’³³ adding that there is a focus on superficial rather than deeper structural change.

THE MISSING PIECE: TRUST BETWEEN CIVILIANS AND SECURITY FORCES

In DRC, trust has historically been in short supply between communities and the security forces meant to be protecting them. This trust deficit has grown as SSR has failed to bring concrete improvements to people’s security. relations between civilians and security officers present in their communities remain marked by suspicion and prejudice, continued predatory behavior, and abuses. Seen through the eyes of ordinary Congolese, there are very few legitimate security actors in the DRC. As such, cooperation and communication between communities and security actors remains limited. This trust deficit has exacerbated and triggered in some cases spiraling security dilemmas, spikes of recruitment into non-state armed groups, widespread security deployments across the country, and ultimately increased violence, including in places that had remained peaceful during the wars and transition.³⁴

28 Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, “Willing Reform? An Analysis of Defense Reform Initiatives in the DRC,” 2013.

29 Boshoff et al, “Supporting SSR in the DRC: Between a Rock and a Hard Place,” April 2010.

30 Interview, Congolese security actor.

31 Analysts argue that the security services are an important part of the patronage system that characterizes wider Congolese politics (Marijnen, 2015), best understood as a ‘collection of overlapping patronage networks’, oriented to revenue generation not defense (Baaz, Stearns and Verweijen, 2013), or a ‘collection of permanently competing power networks’ (Baaz and Verweijen, 2013). Esther Marijnen, “Responsibility without Coherence? The Responsibility to Rebuild and Protect in the DRC,” 2015; Maria Eriksson Baaz, Jason Stearns, and Judith Verweijen, “The National Army and Armed Groups in the Eastern Congo: Untangling the Gordian Knot of Insecurity,” 2013; Maria Eriksson Baaz and Judith Verweijen. *The volatility of a half-cooked bouillabaisse: rebel–military integration and conflict dynamics in the eastern DRC, 2013.*

32 Interview, Congolese security actor.

33 Interview, Congolese security actor.

34 Most importantly, violence in the Kasai region in 2016 and 2017 that killed an estimated 5000 people; “World Report 2018: Rights Trends in Democratic Republic of Congo,” Human Rights Watch, January 18, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/democratic-republic-congo>.

The above mentioned approaches to SSR recognized the trust deficit as an aggravation or impediment to their intended outcome. However, they rarely sought out to address it directly. Yet, the success and durability of any of these SSR initiatives hinges on the perception of mutual gain by security forces and civilians in the SSR process. When communities see their needs served by collaboration with security forces, and when security forces see their needs served by collaboration with civilians, incentives are triggered for lasting institutional and behavioral change. With this in mind, SSR efforts implemented through a relationship-oriented lens can build trust, then collaboration, and gradually work towards accountability in a way that emphasizes the mutual benefit to civilians and security.

Relationship building starts with people. Identifying champions for change within the security sector is a critical first step. Search for Common Ground (Search) and other practitioners have worked with individuals within the Congolese security system who have been courageous and effective champions for reform. An important initial step requires understanding their own perceptions as to the major barriers to changing their own behaviors. This initial conversation can then transform into identifying incentives for all parties and then creating a space for collaboration and improved practice between security actors and communities.

Inherent in this approach is an important paradigm shift - to consider security actors not as “external” to the communities in which they are deployed, but as members of the community itself. This creates a sense of shared needs, shared aspirations, and mutual accountability with the community members in achieving those results. Search’s experience and data, as well as that of local practitioners and experts, can offer valuable lessons on improving this perception.³⁵ Achieving this outcome requires overcoming historically adversarial relationships to build trust. Rather than promoting naming and shaming as the primary accountability method for the security sector, increased positive interactions between civilians, soldiers, and police can shift the incentive structure to promote shared interests. This shifts the perceptions from adversaries to collaborators and celebrates the gains that can be achieved through collaboration. This has been proven particularly effective in conjunction with efforts to raise the knowledge and awareness of DRC security forces and civilians as to their rights and responsibilities and to strengthen communication, accountability, and cooperation between them.

This approach recognizes that durable change requires incentives at both the supply and the demand side. There needs to be a supply of adequate mechanisms to respond to demand for improved accountability and stronger relationships between security and civilians. On the supply side, successful SSR work is iterative and requires multi-layered engagement over time. Improvements to security relations with communities can help set the foundation for additional SSR efforts tackling other issues and creating institutions and mechanisms to respond to demands for accountability and improved security. Efforts to meet this supply include training on human rights and conflict transformation, training for security actors on skills for engaging communities constructively and protecting rights, community committees with units of the Armed Forces of the Demo-

35 For an overview of and key results from a decade of Search’s SSR programming, “DRC: SSR Technical Strategy Document,” Search for Common Ground, 2017, https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Search-DRC-SSR_Technical_Strategy_Document.pdf.

cratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and Congolese National Police (PNC) and community members,³⁶ and solidarity activities.³⁷ These activities build relationships between security forces and communities, break down stereotypes on both sides, and open avenues for ongoing dialogue.

On the demand side, there needs to be a shift in social norms and expectations regarding what civilians' demand from the security forces and vice versa. A wide range of complementary communication efforts including radio programs, films, participatory theatre, and comic strips can tackle the demand side by shifting attitudes and perceptions on security forces and their role within the community. These communication efforts have been complemented by training to increase citizen understanding of the role of security actors and ways to engagement, as well as solidarity activities including community meetings known as *Tribunes D'Expression Populaire*. These efforts are all linked by their focus on ensuring that security is "owned" by all Congolese and that accountability is derived from mutual expectations of joint-security developed from the communities who are being served, including security and government officials. This approach has resulted in demonstrable improvements in relations between civilians and security actors, collapsing entrenched stereotypes, and embedding new mutual expectations that inform improved practices.

Value of add of community-driven approaches to SSR

SSR efforts that focus on the relationship between community and security forces have demonstrated positive security outcomes, such as reduction of reported abuses and an improved sense of security. With long-term commitment and agile, strategic support, such organic, community-led change can offer a new foundation for legitimacy, even in the most challenging contexts.³⁸ These findings show that reframing SSR through the lens of trust- and relationship-building can foster new expectations and norms in civil-security relations in DRC and other complex crises.



*Activities that sought to break down barriers and improve communication and trust between security forces and civilians have shown marked increase in the public perception of security. Participatory theater, mobile cinema of peace-related content, community meetings known as "Tribunes d'Expressions Populaires," and the promotion of positive role models through a range of interactive events and media messaging have led to a perceived increase by civilians in security, as well as a readiness to accept and gradually collaborate with security forces. **After a series of initiatives to raise awareness of security roles and responsibilities, human rights protection, as well as joint activities between civilians and security forces, 92% of the community said they felt that the security forces pro-***

36 These include Comités d'Appui à la Justice Militaire, Comités Provinciaux d'Appui à la Justice Militaire, Comité Locaux de Sécurité de Proximité, as committees within PNC and FARDC units.

37 Ibid.

38 This brief is based on significant desk-based research supplemented by 40 structured and semi-structured interviews with key informants, including serving and former members of the Congolese security forces, representatives of civil society, and international observers and diplomats. The interviews were conducted in Kinshasa and Goma in early 2017.

tected them.³⁹ In areas where participatory theatre performances helped communities to non-violently transform their conflicts, the perception of the rates of arbitrary arrest fell from 70% to 40%.⁴⁰

Community-based approaches that center around improved relationships between security forces and communities offer a path to improve civilian protection and local security. Taken together, community-driven approaches generate invaluable insight, understanding, and case-studies of positive change as defined by civilians and security actors themselves. These then constitute the basis for new narratives and norms to shape the mutual expectations that define relationships between communities and security actors. Over the past decade, Search and other practitioner organizations have implemented programming to shift norms and improve relationships between communities and security. This section will outline some achievements and advantages of locally-anchored, community-driven approaches to SSR undertaken in the DRC:

1. **Improved protection outcomes.** Protection initiatives, rooted in changing behavior through improved human relationships and shifting incentives, have shown increases in the perception of improved protection outcomes. In response to a 2014 survey, 94% of people felt the FARDC provided better protection services after they were trained on human rights and community engagement.⁴¹
2. **Community-led SSR approaches persist through crises and despite setbacks.** Traditional SSR approaches often become conflated with policy directives of the government or donor community and thus can become political bargaining chips. Because community-led approaches seek to transform relationships within communities, they are able to continue functioning even at times of increased tension between donors and government. In these scenarios, high-level, centralized programs are often suspended or abandoned. When security forces are implicated in human rights abuses, donor support to train and equip initiatives fall under increased scrutiny. The provision of equipment, weapons, or operational training poses potential reputational risks for funders who do not want to see their support misused. Initiatives that have improved relationships and attitudinal shifts over the long-term have proved resilient to the stresses that have seen many other initiatives close.
3. **Strengthened relationships between communities and security forces last beyond the project cycle.** Because community-based SSR approaches are rooted in transforming relationships and not the provision of material support, the results of improved relationships can be felt after the program formally end.⁴² These efforts also nurture organic leadership among security forces themselves to

39 Ibid.

40 "Lobi Mokolo Ya Sika "Tomorrow Is a New Day" Final Project Report," Search for Common Ground, August 2009. This project report is available upon request.

41 "Police & Communities Need You," Search for Common Ground, June 22, 2015, <https://www.sfcg.org/police-and-communities-need-you/>.

42 Search was able to help build and support structures within security forces to sustain and institutionalize reform. Most important among these is the Services d'Education Civique, Patriotique et d'Action Social (SECAS) within the FARDC, which grew out of the Service d'Education Civique et Patriotique (SECP), an institution which has been a key partner of Search since the inception of its work on SSR. SECAS is now self-sustaining, and has the institutional weight to drive continued reform, despite budget shortfalls, and has attracted the support of a number of other international actors.

build a constituency in support of improved community-relations in the long-term. Conditions in the DRC – notably, ongoing conflict and repeated and abrupt deployment of units away from communities where they have established positive relationships – have challenged the durability of improved security-civilian relationships. However, changed behaviors and attitudes among both civilian and security actors have persisted in many places. Many of the initiatives started at the unit-level committees within the FARDC and PNC have persisted long past the end of program assistance.

Close and continued contact with both communities and deployed security actors enables real and ongoing learning for actors engaging in SSR. Getting to the heart of concerns of both civilians and security forces demands trust, long-term commitment, and an established history of positive interactions that can only come from long-term engagement.⁴³ This then enables flexible and iterative enhancement of support to effectively identify and meet real needs, and therefore build credibility and strengthen relationships.



*Search's SSR initiatives recognized the power of story, characters, and role models as an avenue to open reflection about the roles of security actors and civilians, and they create positive and negative role models. Using comic books aligned with radio and television drama, Search created iconic characters which became iconic for security forces and citizens alike as a reflection of positive and negative roles. The notorious Commandant Janvier, in Search's first comic book series (*Tomorrow is a New Day*), represented the corrupt, violent, and greedy officer who found his nemesis in 'Serge' the soldier who was able to "do the right thing" even despite Commandant Janvier's antics.*

The setting of social norms through narrative formats was reinforced through community-based participatory theater, which fictionalized community conflicts and recruited citizens to help offer solutions. It later inspired a real-life community-driven competition to identify real life role models (inspiring the name Ndakisa, meaning "role model" in Lingala). These role models were then celebrated in public, profiled in the press, and iconized through a TV series dramatizing some of the choices that such role models were making to hold up their integrity.

These efforts produced change not only within the civilian population, but also within the security forces themselves. In 2016, 73.6% of soldiers and police officers who had been exposed to Search's radio drama, comic books, or participatory theatre reported that it had given them the desire to change their behavior.⁴⁴

43 Search has maintained its SSR program in the DRC since 2007, running through four separate iterations over a very turbulent period. Though the overall approach has remained constant, there have been significant refinements to the approach and theory of change driving the project, including expanding geographical focus, a shift of emphasis from working largely with military officers to include the police and civilian actors, and harmonization with wider international community initiatives, notably the International Strategy for Support to Stabilization and Security (I4S).

44 "Rapport Des Auditeurs, Lecteurs Et Téléspectateurs: Final Project Report" Search for Common Ground, October 2016. Report is available upon request.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE SSR IN DRC AND BEYOND

Effective SSR in fragile countries with weak institutions and histories of repression requires changing the lens on SSR from prescriptive training or technical reform to an iterative and long-term process that bridges trust deficits between security forces and the communities they serve. Local and international actors can support initiatives that both meet immediate needs and cultivate new norms of behavior to ensure that change is sustainable for the long term. Pure military assistance programs will continue to be necessary to respond to short term imperatives to respond to severe security threats. But in complex situations, such as the DRC, where multiple non-state armed groups are present and the state is locked into adversarial relations with communities, SSR efforts that do not incorporate the perspectives of the community and the environment into which forces are deployed, will continue to address only part of the problem. It is necessary to balance security cooperation with a new approach that brings legitimacy to the center of the SSR conversation.

Over the last decade, SSR evaluations have pointed out the limits of train and equip approaches or state-led SSR programs in DRC. No matter what efforts are made to train and equip security forces, reform administrative systems, and provide better services to security forces, without intensive effort at the community level to ensure accountability and build trust, there is little hope that SSR will be successful in the long term in DRC.

The following recommendations should guide future SSR work in the DRC and similar fragile state contexts:

- 1. Sustain community-led engagement over the long term.** While short-term efforts to train and equip may still be necessary, they must not preclude a commitment to a long-term effort in restoring trust and collaboration. These efforts are comparatively less expensive than train and equip projects and carry less reputational risk when political or programmatic setbacks are encountered. Donor agencies should recognize that results are incremental and non-linear, and require a learning and reflective mindset to continually question assumptions, unpack incentives, and measure shifts in attitudes, perceptions, and behavior. Donor agencies should identify and tackle their internal obstacles preventing this type of long term investment and reform their mechanisms to enable a more nuanced, organic, and long-term reform.
- 2. Amplify the gains in trust and collaboration from the local level upwards to political and security actors.** In order to make progress, identify ways to amplify the gains of SSR for the security sector, the civil society, and the political leadership. When these gains become celebrated by diverse stakeholders at the local level upwards, and then back from the top down, they influence incentives and rewards to systematically reinforce these same gains. Over time, new norms of behavior and expectation could become part of a national conversation, and thus change the incentives for political leaders to promote broader sustainable reforms. The narrative of SSR can be shifted through effective com-

munication, in popular culture as well as through rewards to champions within the security sector. As the shift is made towards security actors and communities seeing each other's interests as mutually interdependent, the incremental changes made will last beyond the project life cycle, incentivizing their peers to replicate their successful collaboration.

3. Learn lessons from past initiatives and coordinate among donor agencies to advance the sector.

Several decades of work and evaluations have not sufficiently been incorporated into design of new initiatives to improve SSR tactics and approaches. Donors should support learning initiatives to examine previous SSR activities to better incorporate best practice into new efforts. Investing in learning requires a commitment to listening and learning at the local level and being ready to acknowledge failure and inaccurate assumptions. Coordination around ongoing programming and past learning can go a long way towards avoiding the inefficiencies and duplications of the past. Effective coordination demands, above all, political commitment in donor capitals and organization headquarters.

Enacting this approach in contexts such as DRC and beyond would demand three things from policymakers – courage, humility, and long-term strategy. Courage to move away from the traditional approaches that have failed in so many places and to refrain from reverting to the familiar paradigms of the past will be key. Humility on all sides is essential to genuinely commit to learning and reflect local voices, perspectives, and priorities in policy. Finally, patience and a long-term strategy and vision allows change to flow upwards from the people rather than demanding immediate results or imposing them from the top down.

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