The Emerging Regional Policy Frameworks for SSR/G in Africa: Prospects and Opportunities for the AU and ECOWAS

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Outline

i. Introduction

ii. Overview of the Emerging African Security Policy Frameworks
   - The African Union (AU) Security Sector Reform Policy Framework
   - ECOWAS’ Security Sector Governance Concept and Action Plan

iii. Prospects and Challenges for Cooperation and Implementation in West Africa

iv. Conclusion

Introduction

In the five years between 2003 and 2008, African Governments increasingly recognised the importance of security reforms to the broader peace and security agenda at national, regional and continental levels. Over this period, they gradually widened the sphere of involvement to include other actors (both internal and external) and undertook a myriad of SSR-related activities in collaboration with their foreign partners and a core of non-state (civil society) actors. In spite of this, it is imperative to note that the impetus for SSR was more externally rather than internally driven; raising critical concerns and questions about ownership as a number of SSR literature and actors working on the issue have pointed out. In 2009/10, however, Africa witnessed a change (albeit infinitesimal) as its governments sought to demonstrate their leadership and ownership of the security reform agenda on the continent; mainly through the development of normative instruments that will inform and influence further policy formulation and practice on the ground. These ranged from the development and review of national security strategies (as in Liberia, Sierra Leone) to the drafting of wider reaching intergovernmental frameworks at the level of the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

This paper examines the emerging AU Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform (SSR) and ECOWAS Security Sector Governance (SSG) Concept and Action Plan with a view to identifying and highlighting potential areas of collaboration and opportunities for these two institutions and their respective partners (both local and foreign) to
advance what is being crafted as two distinct yet complementary agendas. In doing so, the paper will equally identify and map out other potential African institutions, structures and stakeholders that could be engaged or earmarked for future cooperation by the AU and/or ECOWAS and their respective partners. The institutions, structures and stakeholders identified in this paper will mainly be those that are West African grown or based; such as the ECOWAS Committees of Chief of Defence Staff, Police, etc; ECOWAS Parliament and other key regional agencies including women and youth groups.

Overview of the Emerging African Security Policy Frameworks

In the last six to seven years, a number of security policies have been developed, reviewed or are being drafted in Africa within the ambit of SSR to tackle both domestic and shared (cross-border or regional) security challenges. At the moment, both the Commissions of the African Union\(^1\) and ECOWAS\(^2\) have finalised the draft of their respective SSR and SSG policy frameworks and are hopefully on the verge of presenting these to the final authority of the Heads of State and Government for approval. In this section, I present an overview of both the AU and ECOWAS SSR and SSG instruments respectively; and further discuss their linkages and areas of complementarities.

The Evolving African Union (AU) Security Sector Reform Policy Framework:

The decision to develop an African Union Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform (hereinafter referred to as AU-SSR-PF) was taken in February 2008 by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government during its tenth ordinary session.\(^3\) This decision explicitly mandated the AU Commission “... to develop a comprehensive AU Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform (SSR), within the context of the Policy Framework on Post-conflict Reconstruction and Development adopted by the Executive Council in Banjul in June 2006”\(^4\). It is against the backdrop of its derivation from the PCRD that the AU-SSR-PF is intended as a tool for post-conflict reconstruction. Nonetheless, it is also aligned with other AU peace and security instruments such as the Constitutive Act of the African Union (2000), the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (2002), and the Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defence and Security Policy (2006).

The proposed the AU-SSR-PF recognize that the security sector should be a core subject of regular institutional renewal and in this regard SSR is perceived to be an ongoing activity and essential element of the conflict prevention (similar to the ECOWAS

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4 Ibid, Assembly/AU/Dec.177(x). **Note the Executive Council is mainly composed of Ministers of Foreign Affairs or such other Ministers or Authorities as are designated by the Governments of Member States.**
view), peacemaking, early recovery, peace-building and sustainable development agenda. It is further envisaged that the proposed AU-SSR-PF will elaborate what the continent perceives as guiding principles for SSR including in relation to African leadership, ownership, solidarity and partnerships in SSR. The proposed AU-SSR-PF is also expected to incorporate non-traditional security related actors and thematic areas that are vital to SSR/G in the continent; including informal, customary and traditional security and justice providers; faith based groups; hitherto marginalized groups such as youth and women’s groups. Given the AU’s gender parity principle and its commitment to gender equality and the development of women, especially in this AU declared Decade of the African Woman (2010-2020), it is expected that the proposed AU-SSR-PF will incorporate and also prioritize gender and women’s rights. It is equally envisaged that the proposed AU-SSR-PF will outline what the priorities of the continent are vis-a-vis SSR/G programming (assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) as well as the role and function of the AU, its Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Member States in these phases. In addition, the framework is expected to explicit state what the AU expects of its partners and donors in relation to SSR/G.

The Emerging ECOWAS’ Security Sector Governance Concept and Action Plan:
The emerging ECOWAS’ security sector governance concept and action plan is derived from the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF)\(^5\), which was adopted by the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council in 2008. This framework has fourteen components, including one on security sector governance, which are “designed to strengthen human security and incorporate conflict prevention activities”.\(^6\) Thus for ECOWAS, SSG constitutes a core of its conflict prevention agenda; and although it does not have a standalone SSR/G policy is further elaborating this component of the ECPF into a concept paper and action plan to guide its work in this area. The emerging Concept and Action Plan has as its overarching goal, the elimination of “threats to individual and group rights, safety, life, livelihoods, property, and the protection of the institutions and values of democratic governance, human rights and the rule of law under a human security umbrella”. **Note: the focus is on individuals rather than states and this is in line with the ECOWAS agenda to transform into a community of people as elaborated in its Vision 2020 agenda.**

The concept will highlight the trajectory of security challenges and responses within West Africa; as well as identify the different actors and institutions that constitute the security sector, including both state and non-state as well as local and external actors. The concept is expected to deliver on the following i) a comprehensive security governance framework for West Africa; ii) a security system that is responsive to democratic control, respects human rights and conforms to the rule of law; iii) a security system that is accountable, transparent and inclusive; iv) information and knowledge

\(^5\) ECOWAS (2008) ECPF: REGULATION MSC/REG.1/01/08

generation on the plethora of key statutory and non-statutory security providers in each member state; v) the full integration of civil society organisations into community and cross-border security structures and initiatives as to ensure increased responsiveness to citizens’ security needs; and vi) an ECOWAS leadership in security governance in the region. The accompanying Action Plan will further elaborate on these deliverables and will include specific sets of activities, outputs, monitoring indicators and budget for its attainment; all of which are expected to be delivered by 2012.

Prospects and Challenges for Cooperation and Implementation in West Africa

No doubt, the AU-SSR-PF and ECOWAS SSG Concept and Action Plan will together constitute a coherent and robust framework for advancing the implementation of SSR/G and leveraging African agency in this area. In terms of prospects for cooperation, the ECOWAS SSG concept and action plan process has as a matter of fact already informed the AU-SSR-PF drafting process as in addition to its post-conflict reconstruction process this reiterates the utility of SSR as a conflict prevention tool. Likewise, the AU-SSR-PF can inform the development of the proposed comprehensive security governance framework for West Africa.

The robustness of both frameworks is also important for engaging and fostering improved collaboration between other relevant institutions and departments within both the AU and ECOWAS in SSR/G related work. Within the AU level for instance, this would include engaging the Continental Early Warning System, the African Standby Force, the Women and Gender Directorate, CIDO, and the Pan-African Parliament. Similarly within ECOWAS this will include engaging ECOWARN, the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF), ECOWAS Parliament, the Community Court for Justice, the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID), ECOWAS Gender Development Centre, and the Youth Directorate of the ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre.

Beyond these internal institutional structures and mechanisms, other relevant actors that could potentially be engaged within West Africa by the AU, ECOWAS and its partners include but are not limited to the Committee of the Chiefs of Defence Staff of ECOWAS (which also supports the Mediation and Security Council), the West African Police Chiefs Committee (WAPCCO), the West African Police Women Association (WAPWA), the West African Joint Operations (WAJO), the ECOWAS Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice secretariat (ECPCJS), regional civil society networks like WACSOF and NOPSWECO, and traditional councils and religious bodies.

In terms of areas of cooperation, there are quite a number of prospects. ECOWAS has advanced quite significantly with regards to the development of normative frameworks that could potentially benefit the AU (e.g. is its West Africa Code of Conduct for Armed Forces and Security Services). Similarly, the AU has been quite progressive in integrating women protection and gender equality provisions in its policies; and though more these linkages need to be seen in the actual implementation of these instruments, ECOWAS can draw a lesson or two from this experience.
Beyond normative principles other potential operational areas of cooperation for the AU and ECOWAS include undertaking joint SSR needs assessment (such was the case in Guinea), leveraging political will for SSR/G including through the NEPAD process, partnership analysis and donor coordination, capacity building e.g. for regional parliaments as to facilitate their watchdog role with respect to regional peace and security processes, joint monitoring and evaluation, rostering, and facilitating dialogue on new/emerging common security threats including on issues pertaining to growing transborder crime, maritime security and piracy, and violence against women.

In terms of challenges the major concern remains how to ensure that citizens benefit from all of these processes. Here again, ECOWAS' human security approach (including with regards to its vision 2020 agenda) may serve as a model to the continent. However, there remain wide gaps between policy provisions and actual practice [e.g. take the continued exclusion of women and women's institutions from mainstream security and justice discourses and processes; the growing proliferation of private security companies that are still largely unregulated (except in the case of Sierra Leone); the problem of presidential rather than democratic oversight of the security sector (as in Cote d'Ivoire); and the challenge of coordination between AU, ECOWAS and member states].

**Conclusion**
To conclude, I will again like to reiterate that most of these is still very much work in progress; and hopefully should be finalised and adopted within the year.