



Reforming Security After Conflict: An Interview with Paul Jackson

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Professor Paul Jackson, a political economist with substantial expertise on conflict and post-conflict reconstruction, discusses the concept of security sector reform.

Q. Security sector reform (SSR) has become a commonly used tool for international approaches to post-conflict countries. What is SSR and what is the conceptual logic behind it?

Big question. In short the idea behind SSR is that all actors involved in security and justice are linked in large systems, or at least interlocking smaller systems and so it makes sense to consider them holistically. It really derives from the idea that, for example, it is no good reforming the police if you don't also reform the judicial service or prisons.

Q. What types of actors and activities are normally involved in the SSR process?

This is a really long list ranging from traditional security actors (police, military) through to non-state actors like rebel groups and civil society organisations. It also may involve media, political committee structures and also intelligence services although intelligence is frequently missed out of SSR programming. Prisons is easily the least 'sexy' subject

Q. How is success and failure in SSR measured by those implementing it? Is

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there a clear idea of what effective SSR consists of?

The short answer to this is 'no'. This is frequently the most criticised element of SSR in that it is fundamentally hard to measure and also there are no commonly accepted measures across the board. There are benchmarks within certain areas, but even these are disputed. In general we are really good at measuring stuff that is easily measured (how many people we train) rather than intangibles (human rights and security cultures). There is considerable [literature about this](#).

Q. The security system transformation in Sierra Leone (1997-2007) is commonly cited as an example of effective SSR and a key factor in building peace in the country. How important was SSR to peacebuilding in Sierra Leone?

It was critical. Not necessarily because it was big or successful, but because of timing. SSR was really invented during the reforms in Sierra Leone and the UK chaired the DAC security committee that eventually led to the OECD-DAC guidelines on SSR. So the UK was critical in developing ideas around SSR and Sierra Leone was critical in developing UK ideas of SSR. The other influential element is that several staff went through Sierra Leone and then spread ideas from there through to diverse SSR contexts like South Sudan, Nepal and Ethiopia.

Q. Did the international community learn the right lessons from the Sierra Leone experience?

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In my opinion the UK has developed a mythology around SSR in Sierra Leone that does not necessarily reflect all of the detail involved in the programming. For example, the UK had a ten year Memorandum of Understanding that underpinned the reform process that hasn't really been repeated. At the same time, the local team was the constant during the process whereas the UK team circulated – this meant that the institutional memory was held by the Sierra Leoneans rather than the UK. There were also serious issues in transitioning from the immediate post-conflict situation to the development approach taken by DFID. One interpretation of this is that it moved from a flexible approach at the local level to a more inflexible DFID approach based on logframes that did not allow for as much flexibility in programmes like Sierra Leone Security Sector Reform Programme (SILSEP), for example. SILSEP had a flexible budget that allowed responsive programming.

Q. What are the biggest problems with the current thinking behind SSR and how can these shortcomings be resolved, if at all?

I have written quite a lot about this! There is a lot in the evidence mapping that shows clearly what we know and what we don't know about SSR. I [have linked](#) an article that I published on some of this that should give you some idea of the key themes.

About the interviewee

Paul Jackson is a political economist working predominantly on conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. A core area of interest is decentralisation and governance and it was his extensive experience in Sierra Leone immediately

following the war that led him into the area of conflict analysis and security sector reform. He was Director of the GFN-SSR and is currently an advisor to the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre which engages him in wide ranging policy discussion with donor agencies engaged in these activities, including various European Governments, the EU, the UN and the World Bank as well as the UK Government.

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101 Clerkenwell Road London
EC1R 5BX
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