

Challenges Facing the Implementation of Security Sector Reform Programme in Guinea-Bissau

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INTRODUCTION

Guinea-Bissau is a country where absence of war does not mean peace. Thirty seven years since independence in 1974 following 13 years of a war of national liberation struggle and subsequent intermittent political-military upheavals and an eleven month armed conflict in 1988-89, the country continues to be awash with arms, in particular small arms and light weapons; plagued by constant political, social and security tensions; and recently with drug trafficking and organized crime emerging as a new threat. It has become an international aid orphan with extreme poverty, rapid changes of governments, coups and attempted coups by the military which remains the de facto power in the country. With these recurrent cycles of political-military instability, since 1994 no government or president has been able to complete a full mandate.

The government is unable to pay the salaries of its civil servants and the military and to provide basic services for its people in a country which ranks 164 out of 169 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI). The country has deteriorated to the extent that everything is a priority in Guinea-Bissau. Therefore, not knowing where to start complicates the efforts of international partners wishing to assist the country. Security Sector Reform (SSR) programme is considered by the Government of Guinea-Bissau as one of its priority peacebuilding projects. The programme was officially launched in the National Assembly (Parliament) on 23 January 2008 when General Tagme Na Waie, the erstwhile Chief of General Staff gave the military's endorsement.

The first and most pressing task is to bring stability to the country, hence the urgent need to implement SSR, consequently identified by national stakeholders and international partners as central to long term peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau. On 23 November 2008, a few hours after an assassination attempt, allegedly planned by Chief of Naval Staff, Rear Admiral Americo Bubo Na Tchuto, on the life of late President Bernardo 'Nino' Vieira, I met with him in his bullet ridden residence. President Vieira had one message for the international community. Help us with the implementation of Security Sector Reform. He stressed that SSR was the only option to confront the vicious cycle of violence and instability plaguing his country. He said that without SSR, his personal security could not be guaranteed. A few months after this conversation, President Vieira and General Batista Tagme Na waie were brutally

assassinated respectively on 1 and 2 March 2009 by elements of the Armed Forces who are yet to be apprehended and brought to justice. Thus reinforcing the environment of blatant impunity for which Guinea-Bissau is noted.

In December 2008, General Tagme told me that some parallel forces were operating within the country and that this was tantamount to ‘playing with matches next to gun powder’. Although he did not elaborate, the explosion that followed with the double assassinations in March 2009 is a set back to the implementation of SSR in Guinea-Bissau. General Tagme used to say that if he were killed in the morning, President Vieira would be buried in the evening of the same day. It turned out that both were assassinated within a few hours of each other. Today, Guinea-Bissau remains unstable and ungovernable. Until SSR is fully implemented, Rule of Law will continue to be a charade and impunity will continue to be the order of the day in the country. The double assassinations of President Vieira and General Tagme constitutes a wakeup call for the international community to work within the SSR Programme to help train the defense and the security forces and professionalize the Armed Forces as it is the case in Liberia.

IMPLEMENTING SSR IN GUINEA-BISSAU

The SSR Programme identified four critical areas of assistance in Guinea-Bissau which require urgent international attention in terms of capacity building and restructuring. They are: the defense sector; the security sector; the justice sector; and the veterans of Guinea-Bissau's liberation war. The SSR programme was the subject of a round table at Geneva in November 2006 and subsequently approved by Parliament in January 2007. Unfortunately, the international community has failed to fulfill the promises of substantial financial and technical support made at Geneva and other conferences, despite clear signals of commitment made by the national authorities over the past couple of years. Recently, Angola both bilaterally and within the partnership of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), has emerged as a strong supporter of SSR implementation in Guinea-Bissau.

A critical element of the SSR Programme is “national ownership”. In the case of Guinea-Bissau, the Government oversees the programme through a three-tier organizational framework set up in March 2007: (i) The SSR Inter-ministerial Committee, which is chaired by the Prime Minister; (ii) the SSR National Steering Committee, which is chaired by the Minister of Defence. The United Nations and other national and international partners, such as the European Union (EU), ECOWAS, the Civil Society and key ministries participate in this Committee; and (iii) the SSR Permanent Secretariat, which is chaired by the President of the National Defense Institute. The UN is also a member of this technical-level Committee. The SSR Permanent Secretariat is the most active and key to the implementation of the

various projects. It requires the strong financial and technical support of international partners to be effective in its work.

The European Security and Defence Policy Team (ESDP) was among a host of international SSR actors on the ground in Guinea-Bissau. (ESDP. The EU has decided not to renew the ESDP process as a result of President Malam Bacai Sanha's appointment of Lieutenant General Antonio Indjai, who master-minded the military mutiny in April 2010, as the new Chief of General Staff while the former Chief of General Staff, Vice Admiral Jose Zamora Induta remains in detention. He should consider himself lucky. His predecessors, General Tagme Na Waie, Brigadier Ansumana Mane and General Verissimo Correi Seabra, as well as Chief of Naval Staff, Commodore Lamin Sanha, were assassinated. The EU has threatened to cancel its euro102 millions development aid. Such a development could be obviously another setback, amongst others, for the implementation of SSR in Guinea-Bissau.

ECOWAS ROAD MAP

In August 2010, ECOWAS Chiefs of Defense Staff (CDS) at their meeting in Bissau, made recommendations to stabilize Guinea-Bissau. Subsequently, ECOWAS has worked with partners, to come up with Guinea-Bissau SSR Road Map. The Road Map entails the deployment of training and protection units to Guinea-Bissau; the demobilization of the military; and mobilization of funding. It is encouraging that Angola has taken the lead by contributing US\$35 million, of which US\$12million is earmarked for the implementation of the SSR programme. The most difficult part will be convincing the military not only to accept the Road Map, but also to cooperate in its implementation. The political parties in the National Assembly will slow the process down and could eventually sabotage it. President Sanha's recent letter to ECOWAS does not amount to a categorical request for the stabilization force to be deployed. In the meantime, the military which is deeply suspicious of foreign intervention has put the responsibility for the deployment on the civilian authorities who are not in the position to take a firm decision for fear of reprisals by the military. Without the cooperation of the civilian and military leadership on this issue, there will be no deployment of a stabilization force unless the UN Security Council decides to take decisive action which is doubtful because of the fatigue and lack of interest in the Council.

It cannot be emphasize enough that the reticence regarding SSR among personnel from the security and defense sector in Guinea-Bissau is linked to the question of pensions and/or how they will sustain themselves outside the military. At the level of the military leadership in particular, it is becoming evident that they are baulking over the question of the size of the armed forces and they are not voicing their reasons to the donors. The question of size of the armed forces will only be apparent when more work is done on the defense structure. This was not thoroughly broached during the drafting of the SSR Strategy document. The SSR Strategy (October 2006)

document is the nuts and bolts of the process and needs further refinement, as does the SSR Plan of Action (2007). This is not unusual, as in any programme there is a need to periodically undertake a review of the process.

As to the cynicism over past failures, as long as the civilian authorities do not institutionalize the reform and ensure that demobilized security personnel do remain out of the services, the sustainability of SSR will continue to be in doubt. The failure of past reforms lies in the fact that reinsertion was weak or non-existent, which is why the State and its international partners need to consider the question of sustainable pension and job-creation schemes – all of which come back to encouraging the government to continue with its fiscal and economic reforms. This is why late General Tagme always wanted what he called “SSR with dignity”.

In 2007, through my intervention with former President Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria contributed USD \$2 million through ECOWAS to the pilot project developed by UNOGBIS to train 30 senior officers from the Armed Forces in Brazil. Notwithstanding the fact that the 30 officers were subsequently demobilized from the Armed Forces, ECOWAS reneged on the commitment to the dismay of President Vieira and the military hierarchy. The officers who were supposed to start their training in Brazil on 15 December 2008, out of frustration, subsequently returned to the Armed Forces, further fuelling suspicion of the international community’s sincerity to honor promises. My constant warning to the international community during my tenure of office as the Representative of the UN Secretary-General was that a frustrated and dysfunctional military will continue to be a constant source of instability in Guinea-Bissau. Thus impacting on efforts on the socio-economic reconstruction and development and peace consolidation of the country.

THE CHALLENGE OF RESTRUCTURING THE DEFENSE AND SECURITY FORCES

A critical challenge facing the implementation of SSR in Guinea-Bissau remains a restructuring of the Defense and Security Forces, considered vital not only for political stabilization but also for overall peace and security in Guinea-Bissau. The political history of the country has been dominated by the military apparatus, with coups d’etat, military mutiny, multiple factional insurrections and similar upheavals. The involvement of the Armed Forces in politics in Guinea-Bissau is a direct result of their own nature – being an intrinsic element of the people and the national unity movement organized to fight the liberation war against Portugal, their colonial power. Though over the years it has sought to divest itself of this character, the military has never been effectively subordinate to the political class, the majority of whom, in any event, originated from or have direct connections with the military hierarchy. To compound the problem, the Armed Forces lack a balanced ethnic representation, with one ethnic group, the Balante, constituting about eighty per cent of the Armed Forces. Although the Armed Forces continue to

proffer its subordination to civilian control, recent events involving the double assassinations of the Chief of General Staff, Gen. Tagme Na Waie and the President of the Republic, Bernado 'Nino' Vieira, constitute a serious setback to the SSR process as the pent-up feelings and acrimonious debate will degenerate into further generational conflicts and ethnic divisions.

The present Armed Forces are composed of veterans and freedom fighters from the liberation era, as well as regular recruits who joined after independence in 1974. Account must also be taken of militias and other paramilitary elements. If no reforms are undertaken, for example within the Armed Forces, it will be difficult to eradicate the culture by which a military career is still being perceived as a birthright to participation in politics. All of these components have to be trained to accept that there is life after military service or life outside of military or politics.

A part of the historical challenge facing a successful SSR implementation in Guinea-Bissau relates to the condition of war veterans, made up of the veterans of the liberation war for independence, as well as the veterans of the Portuguese colonial army. Agreement has been difficult to reach between the national stakeholders on issues related to a census exercise, entitlements, pensions and social re-integration. The dilemma of the veterans is also being politicized, with disagreements on whether it is a political matter for both Guinea-Bissau and Portugal or a social issue that should be resolved outside politics. If the matter is not satisfactorily resolved, it could delay certain aspects of SSR implementation. Both the Governments of Guinea-Bissau and Portugal need to address the concerns of the veterans as this might constitute an obstacle to the successful implementation of the SSR in the country. In particular the Algiers commitment to the veterans should be honored. The veterans are bitter that they have been abandoned. Their needs should be addressed.

The main issue raised by the international partners of the SSR Steering Committee during the discussions with Government counterparts was the census of the military, paramilitary, veterans and police forces in Guinea-Bissau. The census of the current active Armed Forces personnel was completed in April 2008 and that of the veterans in 2009. The census of the security forces is being finalized. A successful conduct of the census of all security forces is also expected to pave the way for financial support from international partners. The census is expected to determine and confirm the number of Armed Forces and security personnel in active service and put in place an electronic management database with verified and updated human resources information for all Armed Forces and security personnel so that ID cards could be issued.

THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINING POLITICAL WILL AND NATIONAL OWNERSHIP OF THE PROCESS

A sustainable process of SSR in Guinea-Bissau will depend on the political will and commitment from national political stakeholders to carry out reforms. A great challenge for the United Nations and partners is the need to engage national political stakeholders to acknowledge that the construction of enduring institutions of security, defense and justice in order to have sustainable peace and economic development will not be possible unless they show the commitment towards SSR and maintain it.

During my tenure as the Representative of the Secretary-General, I continuously engaged partners in order to keep national stakeholders focused on maintaining commitment to SSR. One concern that was observed was the danger that more prominence might be given to defense and that SSR is viewed as a defense-related reform. Given the threats posed by international organized crime, it is important to retain a holistic focus and in particular not neglect the judiciary, law enforcement and oversight mechanisms. At the Geneva Round Table held in 2006, international donors were reluctant to commit any substantial support for SSR, but the emergence of Guinea-Bissau as a major transit for drug trafficking appears to have turned the tide of indifference. One concern expressed by the international partners – the need for SSR framework legislation. Parliament has now approved legislation on SSR. It is also important to address the question of the veterans from the liberation war who constitute a key interest group whose attitudes could make or break any attempts to right size the defence sector.

Security Sector Reform in Guinea-Bissau could meet with resistance and fail if it is perceived to be an operation imposed on the national political stakeholders. Sovereignty remains a valued concept in international relations and nation states want to be seen to be masters of their own destiny. However, it is difficult for national actors to assume national ownership in a context of extreme dependence on external assistance, particularly with regard to funding for the process. International partners who will provide financial assistance have to continue to work hard to find a balance between letting national stakeholders take major decisions on SSR issues and impose conditionalities of transparency in disbursements or placements of technical advisors within Guinea-Bissau's security and defense apparatus for better coordination.

THE CHALLENGE OF COORDINATION OF ACTION

A range of national and international actors, including the United Nations system, is involved in enhancing support for SSR in Guinea-Bissau. Sometimes, different actors mean conflicting policies and approaches on SSR, including priorities and areas of assistance to Guinea-Bissau. This represents a major challenge to efforts to make progress with implementation of SSR. However, this challenge is being addressed by the coordination process of the international partners group which is chaired by UNOGBIS (now UNIOGBIS). Through this process, an attempt is

made to present a united front to the national authorities. Cooperation between the EU and the UN within this context could also be very helpful in advancing the process. It is pertinent to stress here the agreement at the recent Praia conference of the need for UNOGBIS to continue to take the lead on coordination.

THE CHALLENGE OF RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

In addition to issues of coordination and competing interests of various partners marked by bilateral agendas, bureaucratic practices and discordant bilateral implementation frameworks, resource-mobilization remains the most challenging aspect of the Government's SSR Programme, originally budgeted at US\$184m, of which only some thirty per cent has been disbursed or pledged to date. These are the areas which urgently require action. Coordination also remains a challenge. There should be a commonly agreed terms of reference based on approach and understanding after a participative exercise with all multilateral and bilateral donors and the authorities. This would not only establish the limits and competences, but also help dispel the reticence of those donors who do not wish to be coordinated because of fears that their scope of action might be limited by a third party. Fears of reticent partners need to be allayed with the fact that coordination is not about control, but about adopting an integrated approach to SSR implementation.

The Government of Guinea-Bissau continues to be confronted with empty State coffers and is unable to confront the challenge of direct financing capacity for SSR. Comprehensive SSR requires an extensive outlay of financial and technical resources, in the absence of which it is difficult to make the irreversible progress necessary for sustainable peace and economic development. Nevertheless, UNOGBIS and international partners have continued with resource-mobilization efforts. An example was the Geneva Round Table in November 2006 when the Government's SSR Strategy Plan was presented to donors for assistance. Unfortunately, actual disbursements have not materialized or have fallen short of donor pledges made at the round table. This could mean delays and negative impacts on the programming and implementation of the SSR Plan of Action,

THE CHALLENGE OF REGIONAL APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTATION OF SSR

In the context of addressing the above-described challenges, designing an integrated West African sub-regional perspective for SSR should be regarded as a welcome challenge to international partners. SSR in Guinea-Bissau needs to be implemented within a framework of sub-regional cooperation, within ECOWAS. In West Africa, the absence of an integrated SSR will not only increase human insecurity but also facilitate cross-border crime, including drug trafficking, illegal trafficking in small arms and light weapons, illegal trafficking in humans, illegal

immigration and insurgency activity which could also involve the recruitment of the region's numerous unemployed and frustrated youth populations.

Creating an all-round African perspective for SSR also demands a regional approach, within the framework of the African Union. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the emerging architecture of the African Union has clearly indicated that peace and security is a pre-requisite for development and prosperity generation in Africa. Among the priorities in the African Peace and Security Agenda are those associated with achieving security sector transformation and those of strengthening governance. Great progress has been achieved in Africa on issues and policies of the African Peace and Security Agenda including the African Common Defense and Security Policy, the Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Policy and the Common African Approach to Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW).

CONCLUSION

In Guinea-Bissau, there is extreme sensitivity of the Security and Defence sectors to the subject of reform of any kind that would imply a loss of historical hegemony and power. SSR touches both the key governing functions of the State that are closely linked to a State's sovereignty and involve the cession of power by individuals attached to their uniform and to their weapons and without any alternative, such as a pension scheme, but to be men in uniform. In Africa, political power equals military power and in Guinea-Bissau, the two notions are inseparable.

Lack of State infrastructural capacity and administrative capability in post-conflict settings where much physical infrastructure or human resources capacity has been destroyed or depleted, places SSR in a most precarious position. In Guinea-Bissau where everything is a priority, SSR will have to compete with lack of provision of basic social services, such as electricity, water and sanitation, education, health, unpaid salaries etc. Equally important, the lack of overall state capacity raises the question of how much absorption capacity Guinea-Bissau has for all the SSR assistance it is expected to receive. Along with SSR, the international community need to provide concrete support for the combat against drug trafficking and the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in order to ensure that the Road Map being contemplated by ECOWAS does not turn into a map to nowhere.

With specific regard to SSR, the national stakeholders and the international partners should continue to work in close collaboration, at the level of the Steering Committee, in order to address the challenges listed in the foregoing paragraphs. I believe that once these challenges are addressed, logically, the implementation of SSR in Guinea-Bissau can start in earnest.

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