ANTI-CORRUPTION IN SECURITY SECTOR REFORM: THE KEY TO SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND STABILITY

TI-DS SPOTLIGHT — Security Sector Reform

Security Sector Reform and Corruption: the Integration Imperative

When corruption infiltrates defence and security, the consequences for peace and stability are devastating. It can lead to the breakdown of the rule of law and a loss of trust in institutions. Corruption thrives in environments with weak control mechanisms, excessive secrecy, and limited civilian democratic oversight. The absence of effective governance provides the ideal breeding ground for corruption to flourish, posing a critical threat if left unaddressed.

Anti-corruption must be integrated into stabilisation and peacebuilding efforts, including security sector reform (SSR).

SSR provides a key opportunity to address corruption because of its emphasis on oversight, governance and the rule of law.

However, existing SSR frameworks and approaches either overlook entirely or fail to sufficiently prioritise corruption as a core cause and consequence of conflict. They also underestimate the political complexity of governance reform in defence and security, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Many focus on "train-and-equip" approaches, prioritising the tactical readiness of security forces over building accountability and institutional integrity.

SSR requires the sensitive rebalancing of power within security forces, and this is inherently political. Understanding corruption risk and building resilience to prevent and mitigate it is crucial. To do this effectively, anti-corruption must be integrated across SSR.

What is Security Sector Reform?

Security Sector Reform refers to the process through which a country enhances the effectiveness and accountability of its security sector. It aims to improve a country's ability to meet its security needs while upholding democratic norms, good governance, transparency and the rule of law.

CASE STUDY: NIGER

One of the poorest countries in the world, Niger's security and defence sector is struggling to grapple with mounting threats, leaving communities unprotected as extremist groups have capitalised on Niger's vast landscape and weak security.

The SSR programme in Niger is managed by the UN under the leadership of Niger's National Security Council. While progress is being made, corruption and weak governance continue to hamper efforts. According to Transparency International's Government Defence Integrity Index, Niger's defence sector has very weak institutional resilience to corruption. One of the main challenges is the need to strengthen structures, laws and policies promoting accountable, efficient and democratic defense and security institutions. Oversight is severely hindered by poor information flows between the government, audit bodies and parliament, and the defence budget remains only partly transparent. There is no military doctrine identifying corruption as a strategic issue for operations, nor are there any systems in place to mitigate its effects. This lack of emphasis on corruption risks undermining military operations and attempts to build integrity within the armed forces.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY INTEGRATING ANTI-CORRUPTION?

Integrating anti-corruption means incorporating it as a core cross-cutting component, rather than treating it as a standalone issue within SSR initiatives. It approaches anti-corruption as an integral dimension of the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of SSR policies and programmes. The ultimate goal is to address corruption strategically as a root cause of conflict and insecurity, and to reinforce human security.
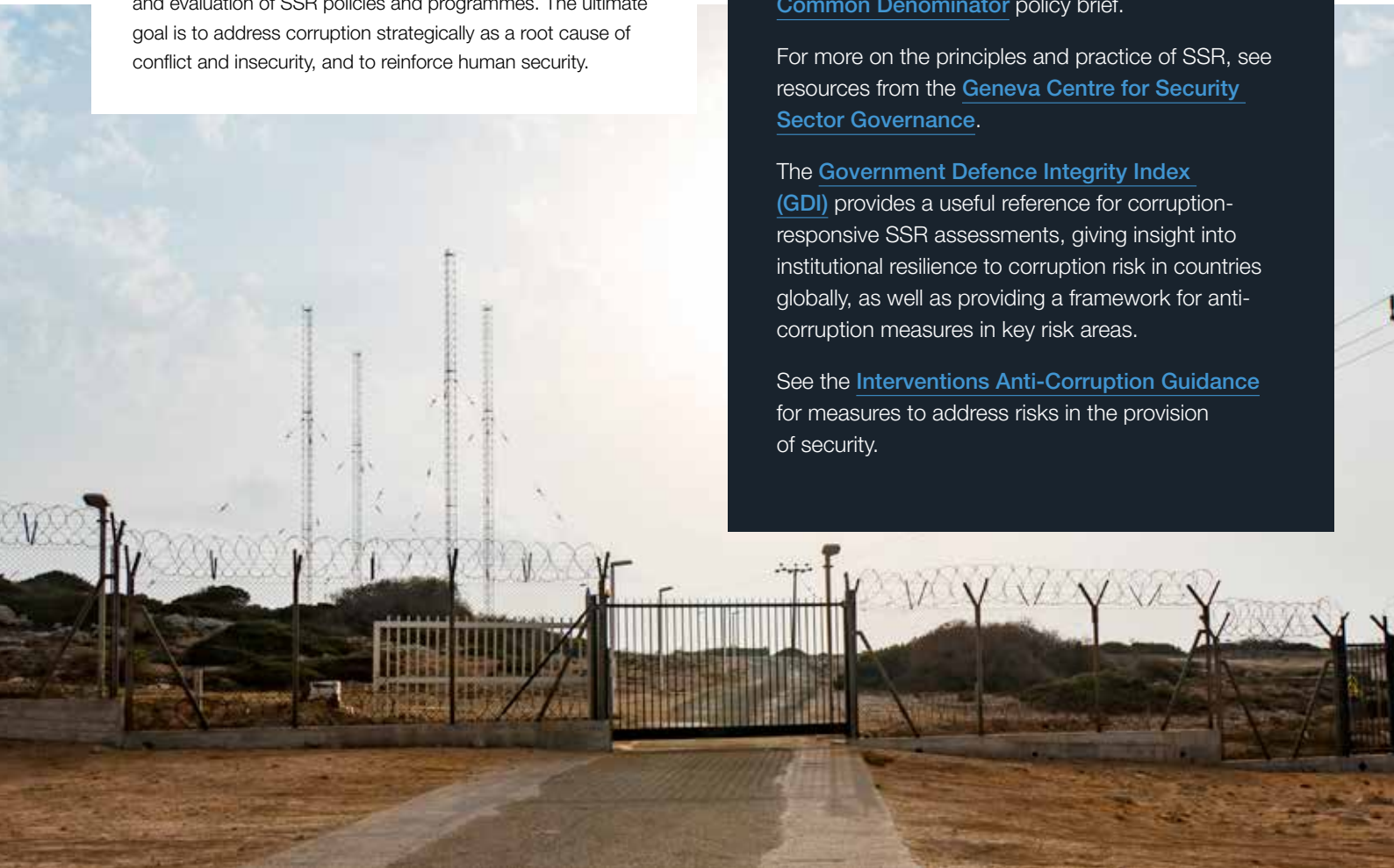
Find out more

For more detail on addressing corruption through security sector reform, and West Africa case studies, see our Missing Element report and Common Denominator policy brief.

For more on the principles and practice of SSR, see resources from the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.

The Government Defence Integrity Index (GDI) provides a useful reference for corruption-responsive SSR assessments, giving insight into institutional resilience to corruption risk in countries globally, as well as providing a framework for anti-corruption measures in key risk areas.

See the Interventions Anti-Corruption Guidance for measures to address risks in the provision of security.

HOW TO INTEGRATE ANTI-CORRUPTION INTO SSR: TEN RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Policy Recognition

Recognise anti-corruption as a fundamental principle of Security Sector Reform by integrating anti-corruption standards into SSR policy frameworks and approaches.

2. Corruption Risk Assessments

Conduct comprehensive corruption risk assessments in the security sector, considering associated political economy, gender dimensions and prior anti-corruption efforts. Collaborate with national actors and specialists to integrate corruption analysis into SSR assessments.

3. Independent Oversight Mechanisms

Ensure an appropriate oversight body has the mandate and ability to monitor and evaluate anti-corruption measures, ensuring sufficient independence, resources, and authority for investigations and recommendations.

4. Public Financial Management

Incorporate public financial management reforms into SSR processes. Enhance capacity in areas such as resource allocation, budget reliability, financial transparency, and audits.

5. Transparency and Accountability

Promote transparency by requiring regular reporting of security sector budgets, expenditures, and procurement. Conduct independent audits and evaluations. Apply existing public procurement frameworks to the security sector, with reasonable restrictions as necessary to account for national security concerns.

6. Whistleblower Protection

Implement comprehensive protection mechanisms for reporting corruption cases, providing secure and confidential reporting channels. Offer incentives, legal protection, and confidentiality throughout the reporting and investigation processes.

7. Investment in Personnel and Capacity Building

Implement anti-corruption measures in personnel management, including vetting processes and codes of conduct. Provide specialised training to raise awareness of corruption risks and promote ethics and professionalism.

8. Civil Society Engagement

Engage civil society organisations and stakeholders in the design, implementation, and monitoring of SSR processes. Foster meaningful participation and consultation to reflect diverse needs and promote transparency and accountability.

9. Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks

Establish frameworks to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of anti-corruption measures in SSR processes. Regularly evaluate progress, address challenges, and publish reports to ensure transparency and accountability.

10. International Cooperation

Collaborate with international organisations, regional bodies, and donor countries to share best practices, expertise, and resources in combating corruption within SSR processes.