

Learning from Failure? British and European Approaches to Security and Justice Programming

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This blog post by Antoine Vandemoortele was originally published on the SSR Resource Centre in March 2015. This article discusses recent evaluation reports of UK and EU security and justice programming and analyzes alternative and innovative security sector reform (SSR) strategies. The author argues that learning lessons from failure and understanding what is not working are essential tools of such approaches. The blog post provides a useful overview of new approaches to security and justice reform and has therefore been republished here as a CSG Insight.

The latest report from the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) – the UK's aid watchdog – *Review of UK Development Assistance for Security and Justice*, is highly critical of the Department for International Development (DFID)'s work on security and justice in fragile and

conflict-affected countries and highlights a series of failed initiatives and challenges that must be overcome for this type of aid programming to be more effective. The report's main findings are similar to those from a report by the European Court of Auditors, *EU Support for Governance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, which analyzes and reviews the EU's security and justice efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) over the period 2003–2011.

By framing these reports in the context of new debates on security governance (SSR 2.0) and international development (Doing Development Differently and Local First approaches), I argue that it is possible to better understand what we can learn from failure and find ways forward for better, more effective security and justice assistance.

Three main elements will be highlighted: what are the key problems and challenges associated with security governance showcased in these reports; what can we learn from failure in the British and European examples; what can we learn from broader debates about international development and more politically focused approaches?

Challenges of Internationally led Security and Justice Assistance

When trying to understand the lack of “success stories” in SSR programming, security governance and security and justice fields, both reports highlight similar problems and challenges: overambitious reform targets, difficulty in developing local political will, lack of attention and focus on the local context, a broad top-down institutional and technical program design, and sustainability issues. ICAI

assessed DFID's security and justice assistance with an "amber-red" rating. This means that "the programme performs relatively poorly overall against ICAI's criteria for effectiveness and value for money. Significant improvements should be made." (ICAI, 2015: 1)

The report highlights that there has been no significant development of a security and justice strategy and that the programming choices are drawn from a "menu of conventional components" that is not context-specific (ICAI, 2015: 11). Regarding police reform projects, the review from 10 case studies shows "limited achievement from top-down capacity building and institutional reform." (ICAI, 2015: 25) There is no evidence that the three most common approaches to police assistance — model police stations, training and community policing — have produced improvements in police performance or increased levels and perceptions of security. Monitoring, evaluation and learning are broadly inadequate. The report ends with this overall comment on the state of security and justice (S&J) assistance: "We find that the portfolio is at its least convincing when it attempts to deliver generic capacity improvements

to central S&J institutions, including the police and the judiciary, in the hope that this will translate into practical benefits for the poor." (ICAI, 2015: 38)

The European Court of Auditors' report on support for governance echoes ICAI's main findings. Repeatedly, when assessing support for the judiciary and police, the report mentions that sustainability is unlikely and that these governance programs have not significantly improved operational capacity. More broadly, the report notes that EU support has been overly ambitious and has not taken into consideration the political context in DRC. The report finds that: "The effectiveness of EU assistance for governance in the DRC is limited. [...] Progress is slow, uneven and, overall, limited. Fewer than half of the programmes have delivered, or are likely to deliver, most of the expected results. Sustainability is an unrealistic prospect in most cases." (European Court of Auditors, 2013: 34)

In short, these reports show that considerable efforts need to be undertaken in order to develop more efficient and effective security and justice assistance programming that

has sustainable and positive impacts on the ground.

Learning from Failure

What, then, can we learn from the evaluation of security and justice in order to develop better and more effective international development efforts? I argue that, as a preliminary overview, three elements should be taken into consideration.

Firstly, learning from failure is key. Both reports show that generic interventions do not work. The absence of focus on the political side of such interventions, including the lack of local political will, has meant that technical projects had limited impact. For example, ICAI's report criticizes one of the key practices of DFID's police assistance: community policing. The report argues that a narrow focus — with community policing understood only as developing community-police relations — has had few practical benefits. ICAI then provides recommendations based on what can be learned from such failed community security projects: "To make a real difference to community security, DFID needs to build partnerships between communities and a wider range of institutions,

including the police, in the search for practical solutions to local security challenges.” (ICAI, 2015: 38-39)

What is important here is that these are broad guidelines that can, and should, be adapted to different contexts to be successful. ICAI’s report smartly avoids recreating a rigid framework for community security projects.

Secondly, it is important to recognize and highlight positive security and justice assistance achievements. This should not be done to simply replicate these success stories blindly or to develop blueprints for programming. Learning from success means taking into consideration not only the positive outcomes, but also the process itself. For example, ICAI’s report finds that local community-level justice projects are the most effective aspect of DFID’s programming, particularly for women and girls. The report highlights that “the S&J portfolio is showing promising results on addressing some of the S&J needs of women and girls, particularly through community-level initiatives” (ICAI, 2015: 38) Unpacking how and where these initiatives work might provide ideas for how to develop smarter security and justice assistance.

Finally, we need to take into consideration not only the actions, but also the worldviews, practices and routines of individuals working in the field as elements of both constraints and opportunities. An excellent overview of how this applies to peacebuilding can be found in Séverine Autesserre’s book, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention*.

In my own research, I have analyzed how European approaches to police and justice reform have been driven by organizational routines and practices that frame SSR issues and challenges in specific ways and eliminate some options at the outset. For example, a securitization framing of the early police reform and train-and-equip processes in DRC before the 2006 elections meant that sustainability issues were not fully assessed. In DRC, European officials involved in justice reform initially adopted an institution-building framework, both in terms of physical infrastructure and training as well as organizational development through the Mixed Justice Committee (Comité Mixte de Justice), limiting politically relevant input in the project design and implementation. Such examples highlight the fact that reflexive practices, where indi-

viduals attempt to better understand their own practices, worldviews and routines, can be useful in developing more flexible and effective projects.

Doing Security and Justice Programming Differently

This overview builds on the findings of both reports as well as my own research. It should be seen as an initial contribution to ongoing debates on doing security and justice differently.

Recent debates on international development and SSR have paved the way for a better conceptual understanding of what might work, namely a more iterative, politically smart, locally led version of international security and justice assistance. The limited record of achievement of SSR in fragile and conflict-affected countries in the last 20 years has been highlighted by most SSR researchers and practitioners. Finding ways to develop more effective, transformative second-generation SSR models has been a recurring focus of debates and research in the past few years, in an attempt to think beyond the technocratic, expert-led, state-focused, overambitious and naïve first-generation model underpinned by liberal peacebuilding norms and practices.

By promoting ways to include forms of security and justice that actually exist, including non-state actors and hybrid forms of security governance, second-generation SSR should be more problem-driven, less ambitious and more politically focused.

Similar development debates have led to new approaches that focus on iterative problem solving and that are politically smart and locally led. Making “small bets” that can lead to more significant gains later, developing innovative partnerships, adopting reflexive and more flexible practices, and moving beyond a technocratic frame are some elements that have emerged from these debates.

There have been recent efforts to link these debates by highlighting best practices in the field of security and justice. In a recent report, Lisa Denney and Erika Kirwen have shown that trialling such innovative justice programming can provide a “more promising avenue for improv-

ing people’s access to quality justice by recognising the specific role of development assistance in supporting locally brokered solutions to what are inherently political problems.” (Denney and Kirwen, 2014: 7)

In short, I argue that there are already several existing starting points and options to develop new practices and strategies for security and justice programming. Learning from past failures and understanding what is not working are essential aspects of such strategies. Monitoring and evaluating security and justice portfolios at the national, European and international levels can provide significant insights, as highlighted in the ICAI report’s key assessment: “In our view, the lessons from the case study countries clearly point to the conclusion that the most convincing designs are relatively modest in their objectives and focus on finding solutions to specific problems, rather than achieving across-the-board improvements in S&J institutions.”

(ICAI, 2015: 15)

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