The African Union is committed to supporting security sector reform in its member states. But limited coordination of its efforts with those of others working in the field impedes progress. This report explores ways in which the AU can establish effective partnerships with other bodies to achieve greater policy alignment and a more coherent approach.
Key findings

- Although the African Union (AU) as an institution has credibility as a security sector reform (SSR) partner with African countries, capacity and resource constraints limit its effectiveness.
- The AU could engage with other SSR support bodies by conducting joint initiatives, information sharing and providing financial and technical support.
- In countries whose SSR efforts are supported by the AU and its partners, the lack of coordination may result in a duplication of efforts and gaps in implementation.
- Divergent political and institutional agendas of the AU and other peace and security stakeholders make it difficult to align SSR with peacebuilding and statebuilding objectives.
- Capacity constraints and a lack of political will among governments impedes coordination of SSR in host states.
- Limited government expertise in SSR contributes to the problem of divergent political priorities among the AU and its partners. When states lack the capacity to articulate SSR priorities, there is a risk that they won’t support the reform processes.

Recommendations

African Union:

- Aim to become a sought-after and valuable partner on SSR.
- Develop strategic ways to act as an interlocutor between member states and SSR partners.
- Enhance existing strategies and develop new ones to strengthen relationships with partners.
- Use high-level political interaction with host governments to help them identify and articulate their priorities.
- Ensure that high-level political engagements are aligned with technical processes.
- Deploy technical experts or AU SSR officers to advise member states on ways to establish effective SSR coordination mechanisms and guide the development of national strategies.
- Strengthen engagement with civil society by expanding grassroots partnerships and promoting local ownership.
- Help civil society organisations sensitise communities and encourage them to monitor and evaluate SSR processes.
- Enhance coordination within the AU Commission and between AU organs and agencies, such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the Pan-African Parliament.
Introduction

The African Union (AU)’s post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD) mandate, which was set out in the 2006 PCRD Framework,\(^1\) together with the 2013 AU Security Sector Reform (SSR) Framework,\(^2\) give the union a central role in supporting SSR in member states. The PCRD Framework outlines the key objectives of SSR. These include promoting professionalisation to strengthen the capacity of security institutions and establishing civilian oversight bodies such as parliamentary committees to regulate the conduct of security forces.

The SSR Framework expands on the PCRD Framework, recognising that member states implement SSR in a variety of circumstances as part of conflict prevention, reconstruction and sustainable development. In Guinea Bissau, for instance, SSR is part of broader state-building and stabilisation efforts. In the Sahel, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali are implementing SSR in the face of insurgencies.

In terms of the SSR Framework, a number of AU structures are involved in responding to the requests of member states to the Peace and Security Council (PSC).

The African Union’s limitation to articulate security sector reform priorities hinders its ability to support reform processes effectively

The recently restructured Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration/Security Sector Reform (DDR/SSR) Division, formerly the Defence and Security Division, which forms part of the Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) Department of the AU Commission (AUC), is responsible for coordinating the SSR work of the AUC.

Its responsibility is to put into practice the Common African Defence and Security Policy and the PCRD Framework, including SSR. Among its responsibilities are guiding the development of policy documents and deploying SSR expertise in member states.\(^3\)

The PSC and the chair of the AUC engage strategically with member states by issuing communiqués and official country statements and deploying high-level delegations on country visits. For instance, in February 2022 the PSC issued a statement urging South Sudan’s government to mobilise the country’s national reserves to finance the long-delayed unification and deployment of troops from training camps.\(^4\) While these engagements are mainly conducted on an ad hoc basis responding to emerging demands, they are critical in ensuring support for SSR initiatives at the political level.

Since adopting the PCRD and SSR frameworks the AU has made progress in implementing its SSR mandate. It has participated in supporting SSR processes in several member states, among them Madagascar, where it has operated
Examples of SSR processes the AU has participated in

**Madagascar**

Madagascar launched national reform processes, including SSR, in 2014, when the country returned to constitutional order following the political crisis resulting from the 2009 coup d’état. The AU, together with partners including the United Nations (UN), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the European Union (EU) and the African Security Sector Network (ASSN), conducted a joint assessment mission in October 2014. It deployed an SSR consultant to the AULO in Madagascar to provide technical assistance with designing comprehensive strategic SSR processes and, in partnership with ASSN, provided two experts to facilitate a high-level sensitisation and training workshop in 2018.

**Lesotho**

Lesotho has struggled to achieve political stability and has experienced several political crises and coups d’états. The AU has been involved in its SSR process since 2016, when SADC requested its collaboration in assisting the country to develop a roadmap for instituting and implementing constitutional reforms. SADC itself had been involved in the country’s stabilisation efforts since the regional body launched a military intervention in 1998 after protests and rioting broke out in response to the parliamentary election results. The AU hosted a Technical Workshop on SSR in 2016, conducted a joint needs assessment mission in 2018 and deployed an SSR consultant to Lesotho in 2021.

**The Gambia**

The Gambia initiated a national reform project in 2017 when President Adamma Barrow’s election ended Yahya Jammeh’s 22-year authoritarian rule. The government adopted a National Development Plan, which included provisions for SSR. The AU, in partnership with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Mission to the Gambia, supported the development of a national security policy and established an International Advisory Group (IAG). The AU deployed senior military officers and human rights and rule of law officers to The Gambia to support the creation of civilian-controlled security forces. It also deployed an SSR consultant in 2021 to map SSR processes and actors in the country to develop a coordination framework.

since 2014, convening high-level SSR platforms and deploying an expert to the AU Liaison Office (AULO) in the island nation. It also assisted in setting up an SSR Unit in 2017 in the African Union Mission in Somalia and has had SSR engagements in Mali, Guinea Bissau and the Central African Republic, among others.

The AU has also developed operational guidance notes to guide the implementation of SSR-specific elements. The notes focus on crucial implementation areas such as gender, conducting needs assessments, developing codes of conduct for African security institutions and harmonising national security legislation.

Despite the progress in implementing the SSR mandate, several challenges remain. SSR is a resource-intensive and long-term process that involves a range of activities, right-sizing operations, training, infrastructure development and re-equipping security institutions.

The AU’s lack of adequate financial and human resources limits its capacity to support SSR in all its member states. In many cases support involves sending SSR experts to work with governments.

The AU’s support of SSR relies on the host government’s interests and goals. SSR is a political process, so a government’s lack of political will and buy-in can slow the progress of reform. SSR efforts in The Gambia and South Sudan have stalled, primarily because of infighting and the lack of political will.
Several multilateral and bilateral bodies also provide SSR support to African countries. Among them are the UN, the EU and regional economic communities (RECs)/regional mechanisms (RMs). The latter have emerged as prominent supporters in their respective member states.

Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and strategic frameworks facilitate the AU’s SSR partnerships with multilateral and non-African bilateral states as part of broader collaboration efforts on peace and security issues. The AU-EU Memorandum of Understanding on Peace, Security and Governance, signed in 2018, is a key example of such an agreement.

This research report explores the dynamics of the AU’s SSR partnerships, arguing that there are still challenges, among them ineffective coordination mechanisms, despite the AU’s efforts to collaborate with bilateral and multilateral actors. Accordingly, it recommends that the AU enhance its existing strategies and frameworks and develop new ones to strengthen its relationships with its partners. By enhancing these partnerships, it can promote policy alignment and coherent approaches to security governance.

The first part of the report examines the entry points for SSR partnerships. The second part analyses the factors impeding the AU from engaging effectively with SSR partners. The final section recommends opportunities for enhancing partnerships.

The report was compiled using a combination of primary and secondary data collection. The research is based on semi-structured interviews with targeted respondents from the AUC, the UN, the ASSN and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF). It also benefited from a desktop review of policy documents, academic journal articles and related current publications.

Partnerships

Section D (5,37) of the AU’s SSR Policy Framework recognises the importance of partnerships and the complementarity of the AU and SSR implementation partners at national, regional and international levels. Various entry points facilitate these engagements.

The AU has engaged in joint SSR efforts with regional and international actors whose needs assessment missions are illustrative examples of collaborative efforts. The union conducted SSR needs assessment missions in partnership with the UN, the EU, the RECS and other relevant regional bodies.

It has also collaborated in joint assessment missions to Mali in 2015 and The Gambia in 2017. Joint needs assessments yielded mixed results in countries like The Gambia and Madagascar, where they provided a framework for the bodies to identify entry points for support and establish frameworks to help implement reforms.

In Mali, however, the process stalled at the start, preventing AU and its partners from making effective progress, indicating that even well organised and collaborative needs assessments are not always successful.

The AU’s partnership with SADC to support Lesotho’s SSR processes, which began in 2016, exemplifies another joint SSR effort. The two bodies jointly organised a technical workshop on SSR, which helped develop a road map for the process. In 2018 the AU conducted a joint needs assessment mission with the SADC Preventive Mission in the Kingdom of Lesotho (SAPMIL) and followed it up by deploying an SSR consultant in 2021 to work with the SAPMIL and Lesotho’s government.

The AU’s SSR support is rendered in collaboration or parallel with efforts by other actors.

The AU’s collaboration with SADC indicates the importance of other partnerships with RECs/RMs, which have increasingly become vital in support of SSR. This importance is exemplified by the roles played by ECOWAS and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in promoting SSR in Guinea Bissau and South Sudan, respectively.

Information-sharing platforms and coordination mechanisms help support joint efforts and keep SSR partners abreast of concurrent initiatives on the continent. The AU’s major information-sharing platforms are the African Forum on SSR, which has been held every four years since 2014, and the annual SSR Steering Committee Meeting. These gatherings are attended by the AUC, AU organs, RECs/RMs, AU member states, the UN, the EU, multilateral donors and civil society organisations (CSOs).
The aim of the Africa Forum on SSR is to take stock of developments in the field and streamline SSR within other peace and security processes, while that of the SSR Steering Committee Meeting, which brings together a similar range of actors, is to provide a platform to facilitate information sharing and promote coordination of ongoing SSR processes at national and regional levels.

These forums and meetings aim to align SSR efforts and generate recommendations for member states. The main criticism levelled against them is that they are not followed by substantive or long-term coordination of SSR interventions. Part of the reason for this is that each member state has its own SSR priorities and processes, making it difficult for the AU and other external actors to influence the direction of these national processes.

Coordination mechanisms within member states are critical to aligning the efforts of different SSR partners. States undergoing SSR typically establish national committees to coordinate their initiatives, thus helping implementation partners to complement existing processes. Lesotho’s National Reform Authority and The Gambia’s Office of National Security (ONS) are two examples of such mechanisms.

The AU’s joint SSR efforts with regional and international actors enhance policy alignment and coherent approaches to security governance

AU Liaison Offices can also play this critical coordination role, acting as the interface among the host country, the AUC and multilateral and bilateral SSR implementation partners. The AULOs in Madagascar and the Central African Republic (CAR) have hosted the AU’s SSR experts. Hence, in theory, the AULOs should bridge the gap between the AU headquarters and member states. However, the AU has only been able to establish AULOs in 14 member states, deploying consultants in countries such as Lesotho and The Gambia, where it has no liaison offices.

It has also struggled to finance the operations of the AULOs, which limits their effectiveness. The first permanent international officers to the AULO in Madagascar, for instance, were deployed in July 2013, two years after the office should have opened. In 2015 the AU considered closing the AULO in Comoros and transferring its functions to the one in Madagascar. These cases indicate that the AULO’s ability to fulfil the AU’s SSR mandate remains limited.

SSR implementation partners engage with the AU to help the commission enhance its overall SSR operations. The joint United Nations/European Union Support Action project from 2013 to 2015, titled ‘Building African Union Capacities for Security Sector Reform’, is a good example of such partnerships. The project facilitated the dissemination of the AU SSR Policy Framework and the development of SSR operational guidance notes.
Partners also support the AU’s SSR operations within member states. For instance, the International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISSAT) provided human resource and technical support for the AU’s work in Madagascar, deploying an SSR advisor in 2017 to conduct an assessment of SSR processes in the country, among other responsibilities.17

ISSAT also deployed two advisors to support the AU in conducting a high-level sensitisation and training workshop on the SSR process in Madagascar in July 2018.18 The workshop gave the AU an opportunity to assess the progress of SSR processes in the country.

Partners have also assisted in enhancing the AU’s SSR operational capacity by providing funding either to the AUC or to ongoing SSR efforts in member states. The EU’s Africa Peace Facility (APF), for instance, has been the AU’s main source of funding for its peace and security operations, contributing €2.9 billion between 2004 and 2019.

Most of these funds (90%) have been spent as payments to African countries and their troops, which participated in peace support operations. In 2021 the EU launched the European Peace Facility (EPF), which will eventually replace the APF. The EPF plans to provide €300 million annually for military support to Africa.19

As these initiative show, the AU’s SSR support is rendered in collaboration or parallel with efforts by other national, regional and multilateral actors, creating several channels for partnerships. However, there are points of divergence between the AU and other bodies, including their respective financial and human-resource levels, SSR priorities, support strategies and political interests.

Hence, a crucial part of its efforts to enhance its SSR support to member states should be to provide added value to SSR partnerships.

Impediments

If partnerships between those supporting SSR processes are ineffective, the pathways and outcomes of these processes may be adversely impacted, resulting in uncoordinated efforts. Without coordination it is difficult to allocate skills effectively, creating problems with implementation and possibly resulting in the duplication of efforts and diluting the efficacy of the SSR processes. Notwithstanding the entry points for collaboration outlined above, the AU’s SSR partnerships have been fraught with some difficulties.

Ineffective coordination mechanisms

Section B, (16(j) of the AU SSR Framework emphasises that it is ultimately the responsibility of member state governments to coordinate SSR assistance. For this reason, governments often establish national SSR bodies. The SSR Task Force in Guinea Bissau and the Joint Transitional Security Committee (JTSC) in South Sudan are two examples of such mechanisms.

Effective strategic and operational coordination mechanisms align political decisions with SSR implementation processes. National SSR bodies in member states can be rendered ineffective by a lack of political will and institutional deficiencies. Leaders may not view SSR as a national priority or fully understand the requirements.

Political leaders may be inclined to use national SSR coordination mechanisms to leverage their influence

Another problem is a lack of financial resources and staff with the appropriate skill set. In The Gambia, for example, the government made no provision for the Office of National Security in the 2020 national budget, leaving it reliant on donor funding and resulting in a lack of staff and resources.

In some instances, political leaders may be inclined to use national SSR coordination mechanisms to leverage their influence. This was the case in South Sudan, where actors viewed these mechanisms as a means of promoting a political agenda.

Vice-President Riek Machar, the leader of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO), withdrew from the JTSC in March 2022.20 Machar cited continued attacks on his troops by government forces and the slow progress of efforts to unify the country’s different armed troops as the reason for his withdrawal. He later rejoined, after striking a deal with the president on the composition of the army command.
In CAR the primary focus of SSR efforts has been on the police and military, with security institutions such as border customs and emergency services receiving limited attention. The United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad MINURCAT made significant progress in training police officers to improve policing in training camps but this progress was not matched by enough capacity for prison officers to detain people arrested by the newly trained police officers.

**Lack of strategic alignment**

The different political agendas of the AU and other peace and security stakeholders undercut the alignment of the SSR with broader peacebuilding and state-building objectives. A number of respondents noted that this challenge is particularly prevalent in negotiating or mediating and signing peace agreements.

In some cases, the AU and the RECs/RMs will negotiate peace agreements that include resource-intensive DDR/SSR provisions in the expectation that their partners will fund them. Challenges emerge when these provisions do not meet the priorities and political objectives of the partners and when there is ineffective coordination over strategy. Donors are reluctant to fund the implementation of SSR processes when they have no political buy-in to specific provisions of the peace agreements or political settlements.

The 2018 Revitalised Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) is one such example. It recommended establishing cantonment camps for screening people and recruiting them into the country’s security sector. Insufficient funding for the camps has led to dozens of troops abandoning them because of hunger and poor living conditions.

The lack of policy coherence in a host country reinforces the divergent political priorities of SSR partners. When a country struggles to articulate and implement its SSR priorities because of these differences those who are supporting the processes will not sufficiently engage in a manner that reflects national priorities and interests.

**Enhancing partnerships**

The AU has recognised the limitations of uncoordinated SSR efforts. Its draft three-year SSR strategy (2021–2023) cites enhanced partnerships as a critical pillar of supporting SSR processes on the continent. The union should use its important role on the continent to address ambiguities that impede these partnerships.

If it can identify additional pathways to enhance partnerships this will facilitate a better understanding of how it can leverage its role and ensure that it is not sidelined. There are three possible ways to do this: engage strategically, strengthen coordination mechanisms and deepen engagements with CSOs.

**Strategic engagement**

Political buy-in can be fostered through high-level engagement of the AUC Chairperson, the PSC and special envoys and representatives in collaboration with RECs/RMs. This was the case in South Sudan where the PSC has made six field visits since 2016. For example the PSC visited South Sudan in March 2022 to monitor the progress of the implementation of the 2018 R-ARCSS.

During the visit the PSC, working with the UN and IGAD, urged the country’s leaders to develop a clear roadmap to address outstanding issues in the 2018 peace agreement, including unifying the security forces. The PSC also urged Machar to reverse his withdrawal from the security mechanisms.

Security reforms must be accompanied by advocacy and political engagement at different levels. The AU and, increasingly, the RECs/RMs are positioned to drive SSR strategy because they have a significant degree of political legitimacy in driving the continent’s peace and security agenda.

The resource-intensive technical aspects of SSR, such as training and building security infrastructure, can be addressed by partners with financial resources and technical expertise. However, these technical components are also highly political.

This creates an entry point for the AU and RECs/RMs to facilitate engagement over these issues while advocating for the host state to ensure that SSR processes reflect national needs. Given their political legitimacy and convening powers, the AU and the RECs/RMs are well-placed to persuade host states to develop national SSR strategies to provide a framework in which backers can function and to which they can direct their support.
Case study: coordinating SSR in The Gambia

This case study illustrates how national coordination mechanisms can function at two levels – coordinating national structures and facilitating coordination between national and international actors. Several partners, including the AU, UN, ECOWAS, DCAF, Turkey and France, have supported the country’s SSR processes. As a result, the government established several coordination mechanisms at different levels to ensure coherence. The figure below illustrates these.

The National Security Council (NSC), chaired by President Barrow, is the highest coordinating body, providing strategic guidance on security related issues. NSC members include the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Defence, the Interior and Justice ministers and the director of the State Intelligence Services. The SSR Steering Committee, chaired by the Justice minister, coordinates the policy and strategy of national and international actors.

The ONS, which was established to coordinate the operation of the SSR, houses the IAG, which coordinates the work of the AU’s SSR experts and SSR teams from the EU, the UN country office, the US, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and ECOWAS.

The UNDP SSR National Advisor worked parallel to the ONS, producing a matrix to track and coordinate the work of the international actors. An ad hoc technical working group that had been commissioned by the SSR Steering Committee and consisted of 27 members from security institutions, various ministries and civil society, worked with the ONS to produce an assessment report on the security sector group. The group was disbanded in 2017 after it completed its mandate.

Under the IAG, the heads of the Security Institutions Forum coordinate the country’s eight security institutions. At the lowest level of coordination focal points within the security institutions work through the Institutional Planner’s Forum.

Despite The Gambia’s attempts to establish coordination mechanisms, collaboration among the international actors has remained challenging. The ONS struggles to implement its mandate because it is understaffed and under resourced. The matrix managed by the UNDP serves as a tracking device rather than a mechanism for promoting joint planning among the international partners.
Strengthen coordination and experience sharing mechanisms

The AU can use its political legitimacy to support the host government’s coordination mechanisms. This is a critical step in preventing the duplication and fragmentation of efforts while ensuring that partners supporting implementation of SSR processes acknowledge the host nation’s priorities.

In partnership with RECs/RMs it can also enhance engagement with parliamentary committees responsible for security and defence. Parliamentary committees play a central role in developing and monitoring security policy frameworks.

ECOWAS, for instance, has systematically engaged with parliamentarians over SSR training. In 2011, in partnership with DCAF, it developed the ECOWAS Parliament-DCAF Guide for West African Parliamentarians to address the role, powers, challenges and prospects of parliaments in relations to various aspects of security governance. In 2022 it launched Phase One of the ECOWAS Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance (SSRG) training workshops for national representatives in Senegal and The Gambia.

The Pan-African Parliament’s mandate includes offering advisory and consultative services to national parliaments

The AU could also, as it has in the past, commission institutions with specialised training facilities to train and empower parliamentarians in oversight and coordination. In 2014 the union, in partnership with the UN, EU and ASSN, trained representatives from North African countries.

Training partnerships targeted at national SSR commissions enhance the capacity of officials working in these institutions. The AU Consultative Dialogue in The Gambia in 2018 noted that legal frameworks were required to establish and strengthen formal SSR coordination mechanisms. This means that parliamentarians must have sufficient knowledge and ability to undertake the necessary legislative groundwork to develop and implement SSR policy frameworks.

The AU’s operational guidance notes on Training on SSR and the Harmonisation of National Legislation are potential means of implementing this recommendation. The 2021 SSR Steering Committee Meeting recommended that the AUC collaborates with the AU Mechanism for Police Cooperation and Pan-African Parliament to disseminate the Model Police Law for Africa to parliamentarians in member states. The Pan-African Parliament developed the law in collaboration with the African Civilian Oversight Policing Forum (APCOF).

Some experts suggested that the AU consider transforming the SSR Steering Committee into a sustainable resource platform for national SSR commissions. Currently the committee meets once a year for two days to provide member...
states and multilateral actors with the opportunity to share experiences and lessons learned on SSR. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic the Steering Committee meeting has been held virtually, which has reduced the length and the scope of the sessions. Suggestions that the committee should meet bi-annually have not been implemented yet.

The Steering Committee could be repurposed as a knowledge-exchange platform tracking SSR initiatives and ensuring that partners are kept informed of reform processes throughout the year. The African Union Centre for Post-conflict Reconstruction and Development, situated in Cairo, could potentially support the work of a repurposed Steering Committee in light of the DDR/SSR Division’s limited staff capacity.

The AU must enhance its participation in national coordination mechanisms and be consistent about doing so. While it supported the CAR National SSR Coordination in hosting a series of SSR sensitisation workshops and media campaigns it failed to send a representative to the SSR Steering Committee in The Gambia, which coordinated strategy reforms.37

Participating in national SSR coordination mechanisms would give the continental body a platform from which to leverage its political legitimacy to press for greater coordination between the host state and the SSR supporters. It would also ensure that the AU is not sidelined by more affluent bodies.38

The main problem is the absence of resources. While officials in the AULOs and SSR consultants deployed by the AU can participate in national-level coordination mechanisms this does not happen in member states in which the union does not have a liaison office or an SSR consultant, which was the case in Lesotho. This means that the AU will have to increase its human resource capacity to implement this recommendation.

**Deepen engagement with civil society**

The AU must strengthen its engagement with civil society. Current partnerships range from the ASSN seconding staff to the AUC39 to training partnerships40 and the ISS’s support for evidence-based decision making through research. Expansion of these partnerships would play a crucial role in promoting local ownership. The SSR Framework emphasises the importance of African ownership and leadership of SSR processes, highlighting the importance of local communities as one component of such ownership.

Discussions about deepening engagements with civil society have been underway, with the AU’s Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) expected to lead the process.41 In 2018, for instance, ECOSOCC, in collaboration with ASSN and Oxfam, launched a joint programme, ‘Engaging Civil Society in Security and Justice Sector Reforms’.42 The programme, which involved a series of capacity-building workshops on SSR, targeted grassroots civil society in post-conflict countries.

**Pathways to partnerships with civil society include conducting sustained monitoring and evaluation of SSR processes**

The DDR/SSR Division, in partnership with ECOSOCC, is already engaging with civil society. In June 2022 the two, together with ASSN and the APCOF, conducted training for CSOs in security sector oversight mechanisms. William Carew, the Head of the ECOSOCC Secretariat, announced that this training marked the start of a series of new training workshops ECOSOCC will conduct in partnership with the DDR/SSR Division.43 There are two potential pathways to stronger civil society partnerships. The first is to involve civil society in community SSR sensitisation initiatives. AU-civil society partnerships aimed at sensitising communities will promote the legitimacy of SSR processes by securing broader buy-in. While the buy-in from political leadership is necessary, the sustainability of SSR processes requires endorsement by the wider population.44

The second pathway to partnerships with civil society is conducting sustained monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of SSR processes, which is critical in ensuring the sustainability of SSR and that reforms respond to the needs of the host state’s population. The AU’s capacity to conduct M&E of SSR processes is limited and civil society could complement it by reaching out to governments to address the gap.

These M&E activities should be undertaken in close collaboration with the host government to prevent the risk of alienating member states because civil society actors may use approaches that may not align with the host government’s position.
The Livingstone Formula, which outlines ECOSOCC’s mandate as the consultative organ for civil society engagement with the AU, provides a broader policy framework for this partnership.45 Article 16, together with the AU SSR Framework gives civil society the mandate to engage in AU peacebuilding efforts, including SSR processes.

For this recommendation to be feasible, the AU must address some of civil society’s past challenges in trying to work with it. Among these is the fact that ECOSOCC’s membership criteria require CSOs to receive at least 50% of their funding from their members to avoid excessive reliance on donor funding.46 This means the AU must identify and engage with CSOs that are not members of ECOSOCC.

In order to do so, it should consider using needs assessment missions to identify CSOs to engage with once SSR processes are underway. The DDR/SSR Division could also consider engaging the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, which has access to a wide network of CSOs, including some that do not meet ECOSOCC’s membership criteria.

**Strengthen internal coordination**

The AU must enhance internal coordination both within the AUC and among its organs and agencies. This would promote policy coherence, allowing for strategic alignment between SSR and other vital political goals.

Since the launch of the SSR Framework in 2014, the AU has sought to promote reform partnerships driven by the principle of African ownership

Within the AUC, structures such as the Inter-departmental Task Force on Conflict Prevention and the PCRD Framework indicate the political will to coordinate responses to human security challenges. These structures, despite their limitations, facilitate coordination within the commission and between the AUC, AULO, REC/RM and member states on peacebuilding processes, including SSR.

Since 2020 the AUC has been implementing reforms which include merging the Peace and Security Department (PSD) and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) to create the Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) Department. The PAPS has one commissioner whereas the now defunct DPA and PSD had been led by two. The new structure has created the Governance and Conflict Prevention Directorate, which houses the DDR/SSR Division. The creation of PAPS and its further institutionalisation potentially enhances the institutional link between SSR experts and officials responsible for implementing the AU’s governance, state-building and conflict prevention mandate.

Coordination between the DDR/SSR Division and the Mediation and Dialogue Division could allow SSR experts to consult with mediation and negotiations.
teams, ensuring that the proper SSR sequencing is incorporated in peace agreements. Similarly, coordination with the AU Centre for PCRD could be another way for the DDR/SSR Division to ensure that SSR aligns with PCRD activities in member states. Reflecting this, the PAPS First 100-Day + 1-Year Priority Action Plan highlights the need to enhance coordination between the African Union Centre for Post-conflict Reconstruction and Development and the AUC staff working on PCRD. Direct engagements between SSR experts in the PCRD Centre and the DDR/SSR Division could facilitate joint planning.

Enhancing the AUC’s collaboration with different AU organs and agencies would increase the DDR/SSR Division’s capacity by giving it access to expertise from other parts of the AU. For instance, the PAP could be an avenue for informing parliamentary committees with security and defence oversight mandates about SSR processes.

PAP’s mandate includes offering advisory and consultative services to national parliaments, which makes it a potential platform for alerting legislative members in states that implement SSR to the uses of the AU’s policy instruments, such as the operational guidance notes, to, for instance, develop national SSR strategies.

Conclusion

Since the launch of the SSR Policy Framework the AU has sought to promote SSR partnerships driven by the principle of African ownership. The plethora of security sector reform role players operating concurrently on the continent highlights the need for enhancing partnership mechanisms to ensure that the AU can make effective use of its resources. Persistent technical and financial limitations raise questions about what it can contribute to SSR partnerships.

The union can compensate for these challenges by leveraging its political legitimacy to support the reform processes of member states. This legitimacy would allow it to focus on strategic engagement by fostering political buy-in by means of high-level engagement through the AUC Chairperson, the PSC and special envoys and representatives collaborating with RECs/RMs.

The AU could also strengthen coordination mechanisms by forging partnership with institutions that have specialised expertise for training and empowering parliamentarians in security oversight and coordination. Enhancing the AUC’s collaboration with different AU organs and agencies would increase the DDR/SSR Division’s capacity by giving it access to skills from other parts of the AU.

The AU has made some progress in encouraging internal coordination, for instance, the PAPS First 100-Day + 1-Year Priority Action Plan highlights the need to enhance coordination between the AU Centre for PCRD and the AUC staff working on PCRD. The Centre could potentially assist the work of a repurposed SSR Steering Committee to help the DDR/SSR Division track and support ongoing SSR processes on the continent.

2.9 billion Euro

THE AU RECEIVED FUNDING FROM THE EU’S AFRICA PEACE FACILITY BETWEEN 2004 AND 2019
Notes


5 In 2021, for example, the AU deployed an SSR consultant to Lesotho to work within the country’s National Reform Authority while the UNDP contributed more than $1 million in the same period.


23 Interview, UN Secretariat official, 3 August 2021.

24 Interview, official deployed to a UN mission, 9 August 2021.


29 ECOWAS has conducted these training workshops in partnership with ASSN, funded jointly by the EU and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation.


Interview, DCAF expert, 28 August 2021.


Notably with DCAF.


Ibid.


About the author
Chido Mutangadura is a Senior Fellow on global governance of peace and security at the United Nations University – Centre for Policy Research in Geneva, Switzerland. Her research focuses on security sector reform, conflict prevention, foreign policy, global governance and peacebuilding. She holds a PhD in Conflict Management from the Nelson Mandela University, South Africa.

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