

# Security sector reform in The Gambia

## What is at stake?

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Security sector reforms (SSR) have been implemented in The Gambia since 2017, including in the military, police and intelligence services. Policy frameworks have also been developed. Navigating SSR in The Gambia is a complex task due to the multiplicity of SSR support programmes being implemented by a range of actors, from national stakeholders to bilateral partners, international civil society and multilateral organisations. This report explores the reform processes to identify opportunities to ensure effective and efficient implementation.

## Key findings

- ▶ The slow pace of developing and launching the National Security Policy, National Security Strategy and Security Sector Reform Strategy has negatively impacted the government's ability to provide strategic direction for the reforms.
- ▶ The high turnover rate of high-level government officials, including the country's vice presidents and most recently the justice minister, has impeded the Security Sector Reform Steering Committee's capacity to provide strategic and policy guidance.
- ▶ Frequent change of leadership, alongside funding deficits, has also affected the Department of Strategic Policy Delivery, which was established to monitor the implementation of the National Development Plan. As a result the department has struggled to facilitate coordination between the concurrent stabilisation initiatives outlined in the plan.
- ▶ The government's failure to provide strategic guidance has resulted in international partners designing projects based on gaps they have identified rather than the government's priorities. This has led to a fragmented approach without adequate prioritisation and sequencing of the overall reform process.
- ▶ The National Assembly's rejection of the Constitution Promulgation Bill, 2020, to hold a referendum to replace the 1997 Constitution, is a major setback to the security sector reform process. The current 1997 Constitution doesn't provide a sufficient institutional or legal framework for security sector reform, and some of the reform efforts are in violation of this Constitution.

## Recommendations

### *For The Gambian government*

- ▶ **Re-establish the technical working group**  
A clear opportunity in promoting coordination lies in re-establishing the technical working group. As the only previous platform to provide a formalised role for civil society in security sector reform, re-establishing this mechanism to work alongside the Security Sector Reform Steering Committee would strengthen civilian oversight and promote citizen buy-in of the process.
- ▶ **Fully operationalise the Department of Strategic Policy Delivery**  
The Department of Strategic Policy Delivery was established to monitor the implementation of the National Development Plan. Full operation of the department would address the coordination gap across the different

stabilisation processes. This could be done by stopping the frequent leadership changes, increasing funding and granting the department more political freedom by divorcing it from the Office of the President.

### *For international implementation partners*

- ▶ **Enhance political engagement**  
The main challenges to the progress of security sector reform stem from the country's political dynamics. International implementation partners must enhance high-level political engagement to influence the strategic direction of the security sector reform process. Deeper political engagement particularly in promoting the constitutional review process is needed for security sector reforms to be sustainable.

## Introduction

Since 2017, The Gambia's government has been implementing extensive security sector reform (SSR) processes as part of national reconstruction efforts as the country tries to recover from the consequences of Yahya Jammeh's 22-year rule.

The departure of the former president in 2017 was a pivotal moment for The Gambia. After ruling the West African nation for 22 years, Jammeh lost the 2016 elections to opposition candidate Adama Barrow.

During Jammeh's tenure, security largely focused on regime protection, overlooking citizens' rights and security needs. A 2015 Human Rights Watch report<sup>1</sup> cites numerous cases of enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture and extra-judicial killings, most of which were perpetrated by the country's intelligence services against suspected opponents of the former president.

This illustrates the use of security institutions as instruments serving Jammeh's autocratic regime. Security forces were often used as weapons against citizens and were implicated in human rights violations.<sup>2</sup>

There was also limited alignment between the constitutional mandates of security institutions and their effective functioning. To some degree, the security forces themselves became victims of Jammeh's autocratic rule.<sup>3</sup>

Security forces were severely under-resourced, in terms of capacity, finances and equipment. This led to a prevailing culture of inter-agency competition rather than cooperation, with limited information sharing and high levels of suspicion among security institutions.

In this context, SSR in The Gambia has been developed with the aim to institute enhanced accountability, professionalism and democratic civilian controls over the country's security forces. In particular, it was initiated to drive institutional transformation to align the security forces' capabilities, capacities and structures to the country's security needs.<sup>4</sup>

To this end The Gambia's government established the SSR Steering Committee chaired by the justice minister to act as the project board of the SSR process at the policy and strategic level. The Office of National Security headed by the National Security Adviser was established

to coordinate SSR between national and international actors at a technical level.

SSR is targeted at reforming the country's eight security institutions. These are the Gambia Armed Forces (GAF), State Intelligence Services (formerly the National Intelligence Agency), Gambia Police Force (GPF), Drug Law Enforcement Agency Gambia (DLEAG), Gambia Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS), Gambia Prison Service (GPS), Gambia Revenue Authority (Customs and Excise) and Gambia Immigration Department.

Security forces were often used as weapons against citizens and were implicated in human rights violations

Since 2018 a series of SSR initiatives have been implemented with the help of international partners. These initiatives include developing policy frameworks as well as reform efforts of the military, police and intelligence services.

Navigating SSR in The Gambia is a complex task due to the multiplicity of SSR support programmes being implemented by numerous actors, from national stakeholders to bilateral partners, international civil society and multilateral organisations. Relationships among these various actors are complex, marked by insufficient coordination and often competing efforts.<sup>5</sup> Coordination is therefore a recurring theme in this report.

## Structure of the report

In light of the country's difficult past, The Gambia's post-autocratic transition requires substantial and tailor-made SSR. It is critical to examine aspects of the reforms so as to identify opportunities for ensuring effective and efficient implementation and coordination. This report sets out to provide this analysis. Based on this it also provides practical recommendations to various stakeholders involved in The Gambia's SSR processes.

The report is divided into three main sections. The first, focusing on the actors, outlines the national structures and external actors partnering with the government. It also examines strategic and technical coordination within the national structures, and between them and their external supporters.

The second section focuses on the ‘how’ and contextualises SSR in The Gambia by examining the three key developments that have set the stage for

the implementation phase. These are the assessment reports, development of policy frameworks and providing security.

### **Box 1: The challenging nature of The Gambia’s conflict prevention and transition**

The complexities in implementing SSR in The Gambia are linked to the country’s challenging context. Firstly, the remnants of the former autocratic state institutions are still present in The Gambia albeit in a fragile state. This is typically the norm in contexts where SSR is conducted following a political transition rather than a violent civil conflict.<sup>6</sup>

In The Gambia, the security institutions from the Jammeh regime continued to exist with outlined constitutional mandates – although they are institutionally weak and lack credibility. In this context the aim of SSR is to de-politicise security institutions and enhance civilian oversight mechanisms. The Gambia’s context hence limits the scope of reforms to adjustments rather than the large-scale restructuring and rebuilding of institutions often required in post-conflict settings.

Secondly, in September 2020, the National Assembly rejected the Constitution Promulgation Bill, 2020 to adopt the Draft Constitution.<sup>7</sup> The bill was rejected after three days of intense debates, meaning the 1997 Constitution remains valid.

This effectively means there are limited checks to the president’s power regarding security sector oversight. It also means that the future of SSR is in limbo due to the lack of a legal and institutional framework for the reforms. A significant challenge is the exclusion of the justice minister, who also serves as the chair of the SSR Steering Committee and the National Security Adviser, from membership of the National Security Council under the 1997 Constitution.<sup>8</sup>

Thirdly, the wider political dynamics in the country, particularly regarding the relationship between Barrow and the United Democratic Party (UDP), have impeded the progress of SSR initiatives. Specifically, although Barrow stood for elections as part of the UDP’s political coalition in 2016, there have been

tensions between him and the coalition since their electoral victory. This has resulted in a high turnover rate of high-level government officials, as evidenced by two major cabinet reshuffles and replacement of two vice presidents, ministers and high-level officials by Barrow in three years.

The first vice president, Fatoumata Tambajang, was replaced by Ousainou Darboe in 2018 who was subsequently replaced by Isatou Touray in 2019. The first interior minister Mai Ahmad Fatty was replaced by Habib Saihou Drammeh in 2017, who in turn was replaced by Ebrima Mballow in 2019.

The tensions between Barrow and the UDP finally came to a head in 2019 when the former created his own political party, the National People’s Party (NPP), thus formally breaking away from his previous political denomination.

The function of the SSR Steering Committee was negatively affected by the political tensions that resulted in the quick succession of chairs. The SSR Steering Committee was initially chaired by the first two former vice presidents until the appointment of justice minister Abubacarr Tambadou as chair in May 2019. His subsequent resignation in June 2020 and replacement by Dawda Jallow shows the continuation of this worrying trend.

Adding to the turnover of high-level officials are the fast-approaching 2021 elections. The Barrow government seems focused on winning another mandate and is less inclined to implement some of the necessary SSR measures, particularly downsizing the security forces.

There are also concerns that the incumbent is determined to compete in the next elections under the 1997 Constitution, which doesn’t contain term limits.<sup>9</sup> This means the necessary constitutional provisions to facilitate SSR are unlikely to be implemented before the 2021 elections.

The third section, on the ‘what’, outlines the implementation of reforms across the security institutions – mainly the police, military and intelligence agencies.

This is followed by a final section which, in view of The Gambia’s SSR efforts lagging behind other stabilisation efforts (transitional justice and constitutional reforms, for instance), sheds some light on the challenges that have curtailed the country’s progress towards SSR.

This section also identifies the key opportunities for both national and international stakeholders to enhance the implementation of the reforms.

## Methodology

The methodology of this research is based on the triangulation of semi-structured interviews and is validated through extensive desktop analysis of secondary sources. The data collection and analysis were conducted between 6 May and 29 September 2020.

Interview respondents included officials from the African Union (AU), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), AU Technical Support Team to The Gambia

(AUTSTG), European Union (EU), Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), University of The Gambia and Center for Research and Policy Development.

The secondary sources for the desktop review include policy documents, newsletters produced by the Office of National Security as well as news and academic journal articles.

This research was developed during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which resulted in air and land travel restrictions, thus preventing the researcher from conducting in-person interviews with relevant interlocutors.

To interact with a wide range of stakeholders directly engaged with SSR in The Gambia, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted telephonically and electronically. Once the semi-structured interviews were conducted, the information identified was triangulated and validated through extensive desktop analysis of secondary sources.

Figure 1: Map of The Gambia



## SSR implementation mechanisms in The Gambia

The Office of the President, the SSR Steering Committee and the Office of National Security are responsible for implementing the SSR process. There are however a range of implementation actors including international partners and structures within the security institutions. As such both formal and ad hoc coordination mechanisms are critical components of implementing the reforms.

The highest coordinating body is the National Security Council (NSC), which is chaired by Barrow. The NSC’s constitutional mandate, under Section 78 (1) of the 1997 Constitution,<sup>10</sup> is to function as an advisory body to provide strategic direction for the president on security-related issues, and a coordinating mechanism for security institutions.

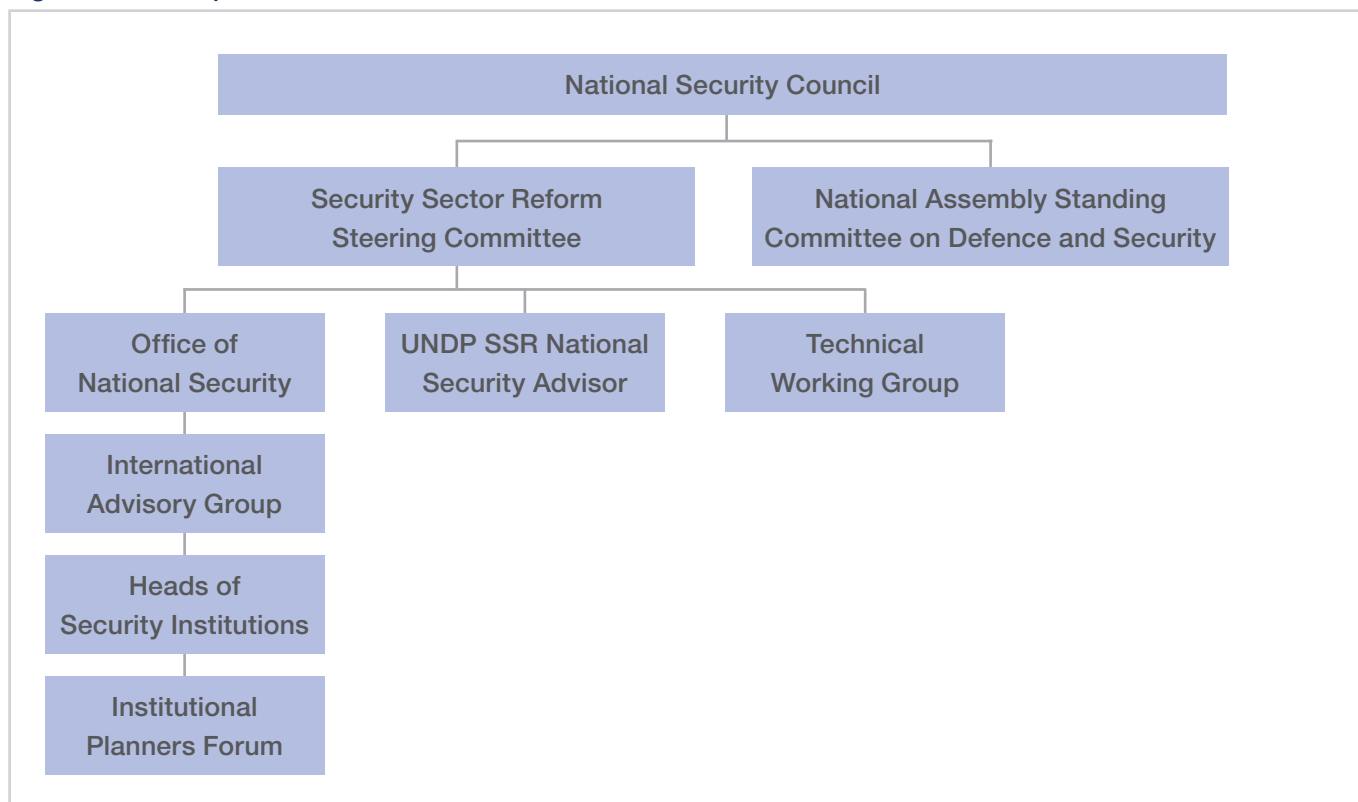
The NSC members are the interior and justice ministers, inspector general of police, chief of defence staff, director of the State Intelligence Services, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Defence and the navy commander.

Below the NSC is the National Assembly Standing Committee on Defence and Security which is responsible for political oversight of the security institutions. This committee is one of the four standing committees provided for. The Constitution mandates this committee to investigate or inquire into the administration of security institutions. Such investigations and inquiries can extend to making proposals for legislation.

The function of the steering committee was negatively affected by the political tensions between Barrow and the UDP

However under ex-president Jammeh, the Standing Committee on Defence and Security, like the NSC, was not empowered or effective. Jammeh instead functioned as the defence minister as this post didn’t exist. This reflects the lack of civilian oversight over the security institutions during Jammeh’s tenure, which is typically the case in autocratic states.

Figure 2: SSR implementation mechanisms



Also, the Standing Committee on Defence and Security has no archives from the meetings held during Jammeh's presidency. The Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Momodou Lamin Sanneh, is the current chairman of the committee.

The SSR Steering Committee is responsible for coordinating both national and international stakeholders engaged in SSR at the strategic and policy level. The SSR Steering Committee was previously chaired by vice presidents Tambajang and Darboe.

Currently the justice minister is the chair of the SSR Steering Committee. The other members of the committee include the ministers of interior, defence, and foreign affairs and international cooperation and Gambians abroad. International partners on the steering committee are ECOWAS, the EU, UN and AU.

The function of the steering committee was negatively affected by the political tensions between Barrow and the UDP that resulted in the quick succession of committee chairs. Several interview respondents<sup>11</sup> noted that since the appointment of the justice minister as chair, the steering committee has been meeting regularly.

Notably in line with this trend, the first justice minister, Abubacarr Tambadou, resigned and was replaced by Dawda Jallow in July 2020. The justice minister is not a member of the NSC under the current Constitution although the Draft Constitution would have resolved this legislative flaw under Section 285 (1c).<sup>12</sup> It remains to be seen whether the government will opt to amend the 1997 Constitution to resolve this issue.

In 2017 the SSR Steering Committee commissioned the establishment of the joint technical working group to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment on the security and justice sectors. The technical working group's 27 members were drawn from the relevant ministries, all of the security institutions, and civil society organisations including women and youth groups.

Although there was no official pronouncement of dissolution, the technical working group mandate ended once it submitted a Security Sector Assessment Report to the SSR Steering Committee.

The endorsement of the working group's report in February 2018 paved the way for an executive directive to proceed to the programme design stage which was

led by the National Security Adviser (NSA) and the Office of National Security.

This security office, which is headed by the current NSA, Retired Colonel Ambassador Momodou Badjie, was established in 2017. It plays a central role in the implementation of the National Security Policy and coordinating the implementation of SSR reforms. The NSA and Office of National Security act as the executive secretariat and provide support to the NSC.

The NSA and Office of National Security are also mandated to provide inter-ministerial and inter-sectorial technical level coordination. The NSA has been instrumental in facilitating the engagement between the International Advisory Group (IAG) and the Constitutional Review Commission.

The NSA and security office weren't previously provided for under the 1997 Constitution. The Draft Constitution provided for the NSA's membership to represent the Office of National Security on the NSC. The Gambia's failure to adopt the Draft Constitution raises questions on the mandate of the NSA and security office. The two were initially supported by the UNDP Senior SSR Adviser. This position has been vacant since his departure in June 2019.

### Limited engagement between academia and the Office of National Security as a major setback for the reforms

Despite the NSA and Office of National Security's critical role in SSR coordination, several interview respondents<sup>13</sup> noted that they both faced severe challenges. Firstly the Office of National Security was under-resourced and understaffed.

Another security expert noted that although Badjie had been effective as the NSA, having a civilian security expert heading the Office of National Security might have been a better option.<sup>14</sup> This view was supported by another interviewee who identified limited engagement between academia and the Office of National Security as a major setback for the reforms.<sup>15</sup>

The security office houses the IAG, which is a platform for international security experts from ECOWAS, the

UNDP, EU, AUTSTG, DCAF and France. The IAG functions to enhance coordination between national and international actors at a technical level to complement the SSR Steering Committee's work at the strategic level.

The former UNDP National Senior SSR Adviser took a leading role in coordinating the international partners' efforts. Even after his departure, the UNDP still produces a matrix which it regularly updates to map the security institutions forum and the institutional planners' forum partners' workplans to prevent duplication.

The IAG engages with the heads of the through the Office of National Security on a fortnightly basis. The heads of the security institutions forum comprise the heads of the country's eight security institutions. It was established to promote inter-agency collaboration. Below this is the institutional planners' forum, which consists of focal points within security institutions.

Aside from these coordination mechanisms, several bilateral partners have largely opted to engage directly with government ministries and security institutions,

thereby circumventing the IAG. An interviewee noted that the government could have prevented this challenge by establishing a ministry to coordinate the reform process.<sup>16</sup>

This shows that this problem has been reinforced by the lack of a national SSR Strategy to provide international partners with strategic direction, thereby centralising the entry points for reform. This leaves international actors identifying entry points, which has led to multiple engagements outside of the IAG. Despite several interviewees mentioning this problem, there was a general reluctance to identify which countries and donor agencies engaged in this practice.<sup>17</sup>

The continued validity of the 1997 Constitution means the NSC will continue to function within a limited mandate

These international partners also coordinate among themselves on SSR support programmes on an informal and ad hoc basis outside of the Office of National

## Box 2: Operationalising the National Security Council

During Yahya Jammeh's 22-year rule, civilian oversight of the security sector was ineffective. Although the NSC and the National Assembly Standing Committee on Defence and Security are provided for under Section 78 (1) and Section 109 (1) and (2) respectively of the 1997 Constitution, the two structures were defunct under the Jammeh regime. In 2017, Barrow appointed the new members to the NSC, enabling the organ to start holding regular sittings again.<sup>18</sup>

During the public consultations on the draft Constitution in November 2019, international security experts in the IAG including those deployed under the AU and ECOWAS observed that the proposed membership of the NSC was bloated.

Originally all the security institutions had lobbied for representation on the NSC. The international security experts under the auspices of the IAG

intervened and convinced the Constitutional Review Commission to streamline the NSC's membership to enhance its effectiveness.<sup>19</sup>

The NSC mandate under the Draft Constitution includes advising the president on issues such as the appointment of high-level security officials including the commissioner of prisons, chief of defence staff of the armed forces as well as the commanders of the army, air force and navy.

The National Assembly's rejection of the Draft Constitution in September 2020 has been a major setback to the SSR process. The continued validity of the 1997 Constitution means the NSC will continue to function within a limited mandate. This 1997 Constitution for example doesn't contain provisions for the NSC's oversight role over security policies and SSR. Moreover, the NSA, justice minister and Ministry of Defence are not included in the 1997 Constitution and are therefore not members of the NSC.



Security and IAG. Although these partnerships fall within the broader SSR processes, they are implemented for specific initiatives.

Examples include the engagement between the EU and its member states, the UNDP/ECOWAS-organised capacity-enhancing tours to Ghana for the service chiefs, and the GIZ/ECOWAS joint GPF Strategic Course.<sup>20</sup>

### Contextualising The Gambia's security sector reform

Following Jammeh's departure, The Gambia's government appointed a High-Level Policy Steering Committee comprising the permanent secretaries in the Office of the President, Office of the Vice President, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, the Ministry of Higher Education, Personnel Management Office and solicitor general.

The committee oversaw the development of the five-year National Development Plan which was adopted in January 2018 to guide the national reconstruction project.<sup>21</sup> In May 2019, the government established the Department of Strategic Policy Delivery to monitor the implementation of the National Development Plan.

The plan's objective is to lay the foundation for a modern democratic state and address the country's socio-economic challenges. The plan outlines a series of stabilisation processes including macroeconomic reforms, security sector reform, transitional justice and constitutional review.

The main objective of the SSR process is to enhance civilian oversight of the security sector as well as promote institutional transformation within the frameworks of good governance and human rights.<sup>22</sup> To facilitate the success and sustainability of these reforms, the SSR Steering Committee and international partners have taken three critical steps towards SSR in the country.

The main objective of the SSR process is to enhance civilian oversight of the security sector as well as promote institutional transformation

First, three needs assessments were conducted to address the lack of information on the security institutions. Second, the SSR Steering Committee, Office of National Security and IAG are working towards developing the National Security Policy (NSP), National Security Strategy (NSS) and the SSR Strategy, all of which are to provide policy and strategic frameworks for SSR in the country. Finally, the ECOWAS Mission in The Gambia (ECOMIG) has been helping to provide security to the country with the GPF and GAF undergoing training provided by ECOWAS and bilateral partners.

### Conducting needs assessments

In order to address the lack of information on the security institutions, three needs assessments were conducted in The Gambia. More than any specific broader plan, or even the National Development Plan, these needs assessments were very important in identifying specific areas of intervention.

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The first assessment was conducted by a joint AU/UN/ECOWAS/EU team in 2017.<sup>23</sup> This was a comprehensive assessment of government institutions, including the security sector. The assessment identified the need to urgently depoliticise and rightsize the security sectors and demilitarise the police.

The second assessment, conducted by the 27-member technical working group with support from the UN between August and December 2017, focused specifically on the security sector.<sup>24</sup> The technical working group's assessment was divided into two broad categories. The situational assessment focused on the country's risk and threat profile as well as public perceptions of security. The institutional assessment examined the governance and oversight of the security sector including the legal and institutional frameworks.

The technical working group's assessment identified the need to update the legal frameworks and develop policies for interoperability between different security agencies. The assessment identified the lack of basic infrastructure and training facilities for security personnel. The working group also noted the need to address the unsecured stockpile of ammunition and arms.<sup>25</sup>

The third major assessment conducted by DCAF in collaboration with EU built on the technical working group's assessment.<sup>26</sup> This comprehensive human resource assessment of The Gambia's security sector was conducted from 2018 to 2019. This assessment identified a critical vacuum left by the legacy of irregular recruitment, training and enlistment processes into the security institutions.

It focused on five components, firstly assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of the management systems, structures and producers. Secondly it examined the effectiveness of oversight mechanisms in promoting accountability of staff performance and conduct.

The third component assessed the levels of effectiveness, transparency and merit-based human resources management systems. The fourth focus area assessed the institutional, unit and individual capacity and how it translates at an operational level. The last element was a staff satisfaction survey. This assessment included an influential gender survey which has been critical in directing gender mainstreaming initiatives for the security sector.

While it may have been ideal to conduct a comprehensive assessment from the start, the three assessments show that the actors were cognitive of the need for sequential coordination. Each assessment built on the one before it.

Interestingly, an interviewee who worked in the technical working group speculated that the fact that three assessment needs were conducted might indicate the coordination problems that have characterised the reform process.<sup>27</sup> This may show that perceptions of endemic coordination challenges don't necessarily reflect the reality on the ground.

### Developing policy frameworks

The SSR Steering Committee and Office of National Security have prioritised the development of the institutional regulatory frameworks and policies to guide The Gambia's SSR process. This was critical in filling the vacuum created by two decades of autocratic rule that resulted in the security sector functioning to preserve Jammeh's presidency.

The assessment identified the lack of basic infrastructure and training facilities for security personnel

These efforts have centred on developing the National Security Policy (NSP), National Security Strategy (NSS) and the Security Sector Reform Strategy (SSR Strategy). In addition to the SSR Steering Committee and the Office of National Security, the Department of Strategic Policy Delivery is mandated to monitor the implementation of these frameworks as part of its broader oversight function of the National Development Plan's implementation.

Of these three strategic documents, the NSP is the only one that's been adopted. Barrow officially launched the NSP on 10 June 2019. Following delays stemming from, among others, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, as of September 2020 the NSS and the SSR Strategy had been validated by the NSC and endorsed by Barrow.<sup>28</sup>

The NSP is the country's first since its independence in 1965. It has been developed to outline the key roles,

responsibilities and mandates of the country's security institutions and mandates.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, its objective is to reconfigure The Gambia's security sector to align their function with the values of democratisation, respect of human rights and promotion of human security.

The Office of National Security and IAG are collaborating with a team of 20 representatives from security and state institutions including the ministries of justice, defence and information and communications on developing these two frameworks. Once the NSS is adopted, this will pave the way for the development of the Defence Policy and the Internal Security Strategy.

The Draft NSS, which functions as the implementation plan for the NSP, is founded on five pillars.<sup>30</sup> Pillar one is the protection of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Pillar two is the promotion of good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Pillar three is cooperation and collaboration between security institutions. The fourth pillar encourages patriotism, positive image and prestige. The fifth promotes socio-economic development.

The objective of the Draft SSR Strategy is to guide the implementation of the findings and recommendations of the SSR Assessment Report. Once adopted, the SSR Strategy was envisioned to be implemented from 2020 to 2024.

The Draft SSR Strategy has five thematic/priority areas for intervention:<sup>31</sup>

- Priority one is to address the post-authoritarian legacies by entrenching democratic practices and good governance, and improving accessibility to the justice system.
- Priority two is focused on developing security governance and a policy framework to enhance control and command of the security sector.
- Priority three is to strengthen civilian management and oversight bodies by developing their administrative, technical and operational competence.
- Priority four is to implement reforms that address key issues including gender mainstreaming and human rights.
- Priority five is to formulate tailor-made reform activities for individual security institutions.

The development of these frameworks represents a key area of multi-stakeholder coordination between national and international actors. In addition to helping the development of the NSP, NSS and SRR Strategy, SSR activities include training, institutional development and gender mainstreaming.

### Providing security

Since their deployment in January 2017, ECOMIG forces have been providing security to the president, state house, government and the country's ports of entry. The remaining ECOMIG contingent has maintained a critical stabilising presence while SSR is under way.

ECOMIG forces have also been conducting joint patrols with members of the GAF as part of capacity building. ECOMIG's mandate also has a training component for the GAF, however its implementation has been limited.

ECOMIG's mandate was originally meant to expire in 2018, however the mandate has been extended several times

Despite GAF and GPF members receiving training in VIP protection, ECOMIG is still largely in charge of providing the country's security. ECOMIG's mandate was originally meant to expire in 2018, however the mandate has been extended several times. Barrow has also requested the extension of ECOMIG's mandate to 2021. This may be an indication of Barrow's low confidence in the GAF and GPF.

A faculty member at the University of The Gambia notes that the relationship between the president and the security sector remains strained.<sup>32</sup>

The continued presence of ECOMIG forces raises the risk of reducing public support and the morale of the security forces. An Afrobarometer study conducted in 2019 revealed that 50% of Gambians don't support the continued presence of ECOMIG forces in the country.<sup>33</sup> Only 44% of the respondents thought that ECOMIG should stay, while 6% were neutral.

The study's respondents noted increased confidence in the GAF and GPF's capacity to maintain security as the main reason for their belief that ECOMIG must be withdrawn.

ECOMIG forces remain stationed in The Gambia to provide the security mentioned above. By providing security ECOMIG has filled the security vacuum while the Office of National Security, IAG and bilateral partners provide the GAF and GPF with training and capacity building.

The three assessment reports, the development of policy frameworks and ECOMIG's security have set the foundation for the implementation of the security reforms, particularly within the military police and intelligence.

### Implementation of the SSR elements

Multiple national and international actors are engaged in concurrent reform processes across the different security institutions. The reforms have been mainly focused on reforming the GAF, GPF and intelligence agency. They have so far focused on training, capacity building, gender mainstreaming and institutional transformation. The IAG has been heavily involved with supporting the Office of National Security in implementing these processes.

Many of the reform activities have been conducted in a piecemeal fashion; this has contributed to the complexities of The Gambia's SSR. This approach is based on implementation actors, particularly international partners, basing their interventions on the identified implementation gaps and their comparative advantage rather than strategic programming.<sup>34</sup>

This shows how the deficits at the strategic level, particularly with finalising the SSR Strategy to outline prioritising and sequencing of reforms, have subsequently impacted the implementation phase.

### Promoting police and military reform

International partners have taken a lead role in supporting policing and military reforms in the GPF and GAF. This support has been mainly in the form of developing policies, training courses and capacity building. Notably the AU has six senior military officers embedded in the GAF and Office of National Security, hence the AUTSTG has been a major contributor to reforms in the GAF and GPF.

The EU deployed a security expert to help draft a new Police Act for the GPF, working in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, its solicitor general, inspector general, lawyers within the police headquarters and civil society

organisations. The AUTSTG rule of law officer was also instrumental in these processes.

In terms of training, in June 2019 the French National Police conducted two-week training on public order tactical application for 40 GPF officers from the Police Intervention Unit. The U.S. Institute of Security Governance (formerly the Centre for Civil Military Relations) also conducted a three-day course in June 2019 for the GPF on civil-military relations. The training was conducted in collaboration with the US Embassy in Banjul.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) is implementing a five-year capacity building plan for the GPF. The project is part of the African Police Program (2019–2022) to strengthen police structures in selected countries including The Gambia, Senegal, Kenya, Nigeria, Benin and Mauritania.

This led to the development of capacity for human resource management, public relations and establishing a police complaints mechanism. The GIZ has also identified and selected police stations to be established. Beyond capacity building for the GPF, the GIZ has also been supporting the interior ministry and Gambia Immigration Department to strengthen immigration control.

Policing in rural areas remained inadequate and most police officers were still deployed in the capital Banjul

The sustainability of the GPF reforms is critical in the context of ongoing challenges. One interviewee<sup>36</sup> noted that policing in rural areas remained inadequate and most police officers were still deployed in the capital Banjul. Allegations of police officers soliciting bribes at security check points have also continued.

A significant portion of security sector reform support has been dedicated to conducting training exercises for the GAF. These training courses are being implemented to strengthen the GAF's capacity to enhance the country's security.

These included a four-month intensive VIP protection training programme in Senegal in September 2018.

A second batch of 150 State Guard soldiers of the GAF also graduated from the *École de sous-officiers de la Gendarmerie nationale* in Senegal in January 2020. The Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers of the British Army conducted joint training with the GAF's newly established Defence Intelligence Security Company in May 2019.

Despite these training programmes the GAF has yet to take over ECOMIG's mandate to provide security.

Firstly, as stated previously, the president's decision to request an extension of ECOMIG's mandate may be linked to the political tensions rather than be a reflection of the GAF's capacity.

Many of the reform activities have been conducted in a piecemeal fashion; this has contributed to the complexities of The Gambia's SSR

Secondly, the main concern with the training exercises is their link with the broader reform efforts. Several respondents shared concerns that providing training to security forces before the rightsizing processes have been implemented did not represent proper SSR sequencing. Priority area 5, objective 5.1 of the SSR Strategy aims to achieve a compact, rightsized and affordable security sector.<sup>37</sup>

The ongoing training programmes run the risk of certain members of the trained force not being in security institutions when the size of the force is reviewed. An interviewee noted that the dominance of members of Jola ethnicity, the same as Jammeh, in the GAF means that any rightsizing exercises will be politically fraught.<sup>38</sup>

### Reforming the State Intelligence Services

Reforming the National Intelligence Agency was one of Barrow's key electoral campaign promises. The objective of this reform process is to turn the intelligence agency into an apolitical, credible professional intelligence service.

Consequently, the transformation of the feared National Intelligence Agency into the State Intelligence Services (SIS) has been a key achievement of the SSR process. In 2017, Alhagi Ousman Sowe was appointed director-general of the SIS.

Key steps in reforming the intelligence service include the development of the Draft SIS Bill which is currently under review at the Ministry of Justice. Although the National Intelligence Agency Decree is still in effect, while the Draft SIS Bill is under review insidious strategies such as torture and arbitrary detention have already been suspended. The SIS officers have also undergone several human rights and capacity-building workshops conducted by DCAF.

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A 2019 STUDY  
REVEALED THAT

50%

OF GAMBIANS DON'T  
SUPPORT THE CONTINUED  
PRESENCE OF ECOMIG  
FORCES IN THE COUNTRY

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Several other reform initiatives are still being planned,<sup>39</sup> including:

- Adopting the Draft State Intelligence Bill.
- Providing capacity building and specialised training for intelligence agents.
- Expansion of the External Security Directorate with SIS presence in all Strategic Gambian Foreign Missions.
- Developing a secure Internal Communications Systems and a comprehensive intelligence database.
- Acquiring required equipment and gadgets for information and intelligence gathering and production.

Significant strides have been made in reforming the country's intelligence service, but challenges remain. The SIS, like the other security institutions, is under-resourced and under-funded, and retains most of the previous operational and technical staff. One interview respondent<sup>40</sup> noted that many intelligence agents were functionally illiterate and basic equipment, such as computers, was not available.

### **Supporting civilian oversight of the security sector reforms**

Under the previous regime, security oversight was highly centralised with Jammeh tightly controlling the security institutions. The NSC was not functional and the National Assembly Standing Committee on Defence and Security acted as a rubber stamp of Jammeh's decisions. Supporting civilian oversight is therefore a key area of SSR initiatives.

DCAF, for instance, has been engaged in capacity building for the National Assembly Standing Committee on Defence and Security, media and civil society organisations. They have conducted training and study tours to Ghana for the members of the committee.

DCAF also launched the SSR Handbook for Gambian Journalists to help journalists report accurately on the reform process. The handbook was produced through a partnership between DCAF, Gambia Press Union and *Fondation Hirondelle*, a Swiss NGO. DCAF has also been instrumental in promoting media and civil society engagement with the public relations officers of security institutions.

### **Restoring trust in security institutions**

Project Trust has been the EU's flagship SSR support initiative in The Gambia. Many of its initiatives have focused on enhancing finance management, promoting reliable statistics systems, and developing a conducive environment for business and the private sector.<sup>41</sup>

The project has been implemented by a team largely comprising representatives from key Gambian security institutions, like the Office of National Security, SIS, GPF, GAF, Ministry of Justice, and the Financial Intelligence Unit; all supported by EU experts.

Significant strides have been made in reforming the country's intelligence service

Some results are starting to show from this initiative, including the development of establishing a security vetting mechanism and the creation of a counter-terrorism strategy that promotes multi-agency cooperation. The Security Vetting Implementation Plan was submitted to the government in 2019.

The plan has been approved by the chair of the SSR Steering Committee, the National Assembly and the Standing Committee on Defence and Security. At the time of the research interviews, a budget had been approved and recruitment was under way with the objective to operationalise the mechanism at the end of 2020. COVID-19 has delayed these plans.

Interview responses indicate that coordination between different processes has consequently been ad hoc and dependent on international partners taking the initiative to engage.<sup>42</sup> The EU's Project Trust for example is coordinating with the TRRC to access their databases for the security vetting agency. Information from the TRRC will be used to assess the security vulnerabilities of potential recruits.<sup>43</sup>

### **Promoting gender mainstreaming**

Gender mainstreaming within security institutions has been one of the key reform objectives set out in the NSP. The technical working group's SSR Assessment noted that women represent 9% of the GAF and 13% of personnel at the level of lieutenant to general.

### Box 3: The AU and SSR in The Gambia

The AU's SSR support has been conducted mainly at a technical level by the AUTSTG's military experts. The AUTSTG was deployed in 2018 at the behest of The Gambia's government. In addition to the military experts, the AUTSTG includes a rule-of-law expert deployed to support the constitutional review process and a human rights expert to support the establishment of the country's first National Human Rights Commission.

The deployment of two transitional justice experts to support the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) has been delayed by the outbreak of COVID-19.

The mission's mandate is to support the government's stabilisation efforts, particularly the implementation of the National Development Plan. The AUTSTG's military experts are deployed within the ministries of justice, defence and interior, and the GAF to advise on institutional building. The AUTSTG has been heavily involved in the development of the NSP, NSS and SSR Strategy.

The AUTSTG also supports the restructuring process of the Ministry of Defence to enable civilian oversight for the GAF. The AUTSTG advisers within the Ministry of Defence have been instrumental in improving the ministry's human resources management, and developing the command structures and remuneration systems. The Peace and Security Council is engaging the AUTSTG on how to manage the arms and ammunitions stockpile in the country.

The main advantages of the AUTSTG stem from the mission's deployment in the security institutions. Also, the multi-faceted composition of the mission has allowed the experts to use internal coordination mechanisms. This in turn enables the AUTSTG to simultaneously support the concurrent stabilisation initiatives.

However, for the AUTSTG, the delayed arrival of the transitional justice expert who was meant to work with the TRRC has been a missed opportunity on the AU's part.

Within such a complex environment, the AU should play a key role in further promoting coordination among SSR actors in Africa. The AU's 2013 SSR policy framework states that the AU has an important role to play in partnering with local authorities to facilitate SSR coordination. This is to help build national capacities for host countries to eventually assume a leading coordination role.

In this regard the AU had planned on deploying a consultant to The Gambia in 2020 to conduct a mapping exercise to facilitate the establishment of an effective coordination mechanism. This initiative was delayed by the outbreak of COVID-19.

While the AU has played an important part in The Gambia since 2018, when the AUTSTG was deployed, the potential arose for more to be done. The AU could increase political engagement with The Gambia's government. The AUTSTG's engagement with the PSC on how to address the arms stockpile in the country for example presents a potential entry point for deeper political engagement.

DCAF's human resources assessment of the security sectors has also been influential in identifying the gender gaps. The DCAF gender survey report of the security institutions was conducted to help identify areas for policy interventions.

The gender mainstreaming component of the DCAF survey focused on two dimensions. Firstly, the survey examined whether women in the security sector

had equal opportunities. Secondly, it assessed the responses of the security sector to the specific security needs of women. One of the survey's main findings was the exclusion of a gender unit and gender focal points from institutional discussions related to human resource policies or in operational planning.<sup>44</sup>

The UNDP, IAG, DCAF and EU have supported the implementation of several initiatives including

gender mainstreaming training. The Office of National Security developed a training curriculum on gender mainstreaming and conducted beginner and intermediary training in August 2018 and June 2019 respectively. The UNDP is sponsoring the GPF Female Network, which was launched in November 2019. The network was established to provide a platform for female officers to collaborate on promoting gender mainstreaming in the police force.

Although there have been some important achievements, the SSR progress has been rather slow, especially noting the concurrent stabilisation efforts that are meant to feed off each other. While such slow progress is not unusual in contexts of political transition that lack the urgency of post-conflict states, it nevertheless cannot be accepted as a given and needs to be addressed.<sup>45</sup>

### **Challenges and opportunities for The Gambia's SSR process**

The Gambia's SSR process problems stem from both the policy context and the plethora of national and international actors engaged in implementing simultaneous reform initiatives.

These problems are shown through the slow progress of SSR compared to other stabilisation efforts such as the constitutional review and establishment of the National Human Rights Council, and TRRC public hearings. One interviewee noted that policing in rural areas remained inadequate, and most police officers were still deployed in the capital Banjul.<sup>46</sup> Allegations of police officers soliciting bribes at security checkpoints have continued. The tensions surrounding the prolonged presence of ECOMIG also show the slow pace of reforms.

This slow progress has been both a cause and consequence of the coordination problems mentioned in interviews. These coordination problems are a major obstacle for effective SSR implementation.

A respondent attributed the implementation problems faced by international partners to deficits in national leadership and ownership.<sup>47</sup> The respondent said this was reinforced by government's lack of understanding of and expertise in SSR. This is a problem in contexts such as The Gambia – governments of countries transitioning from conflict or authoritarianism may fail to appreciate the complexity and sophistication of SSR.<sup>48</sup>

Several factors point to the government's lack of leadership and ownership. First the 2020 national budget didn't provide for security sector reform, relying entirely on development aid to fund the reforms. This failure to allocate the necessary resources for security sector reform is also evident in the Office of National Security's limited operational capacity due to the lack of human and financial resources.

Second, the high level of absenteeism by Gambian officials to SSR Steering Committee meetings shows the government's lack of commitment to SSR. Third, the rejection of the Draft Constitution has left SSR without a sufficient legal and institutional framework.

Critically, despite initial indications of political will, the government has continued to struggle with providing international partners with strategic direction at a policy level. This has been largely due to the slow pace of developing policy documents and strategic frameworks.

Several respondents expressed concern at the government's slow pace in providing feedback on draft policies, and slow pace of adaption. These delays in completing the NSS and the SSR Strategy have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

The government's inability to provide strategic direction on prioritising and sequencing means that international partners must rely on identifying implementation gaps in their project design and project planning. Consequently, some projects are not in line with concurrent projects. The implementation of various training courses before the security forces have been rightsized may result in some trained officials being made redundant.

Without clear direction from the government, international partners are pursuing divergent priorities and strategies. The role of the GAF has been a source of contention due to the country's geopolitical position. International actors have been pointing out that The Gambia is a semi-enclaved country hence much of the country territory lies within the Senegal geographical border. This has led to suggestions that The Gambia does not need a military force and therefore consider dismantling the GAF in favour of a heavily armed police force.

These suggestions haven't been met warmly by The Gambia's government and regional and continental stakeholders. One of the main arguments is that the GAF



is critical for The Gambia to eventually fulfil its contribution to the African Standby Force once peacebuilding efforts have sufficiently progressed.

Moreover, the UNDP's matrix serves largely to avoid the duplication of efforts rather than to promote a comprehensive approach. The reluctance of international partners to adapt their project designs is reflected by the matrix's lack of evolution into a central project document to incorporate comprehensive timelines and priorities.

Despite links between the concurrent stabilisation efforts, there is no systematic coordination across the different stabilisation processes despite the establishment of the DSDP. An example is the justice minister's assertion that additional prosecution of intelligence agents implicated in pre-2017 human rights abuses could only continue after the judicial reform was complete.

The NSA and Office of National Security have tried to facilitate engagements between the IAG and the Constitutional Review Commission. Examples are the consultations between security experts and the commission on aligning the development of the NSP, SSR Strategy, Police Act and NSS to the draft Constitution.

Security experts also engaged with the Constitutional Review Commission on the issue of the composition of the NSC, which had been bloated to include the heads of all the security institutions.

Key achievements in the reforms include putting into operation previously defunct civilian oversight bodies

The lack of a dedicated and effective coordination mechanism to link these processes however means that engagement across the different stabilisation processes hasn't been systematic. One respondent attributed this lack of systematic coordination to the dissolution of the technical working group and noted that establishing a similar structure would address this challenge.<sup>49</sup>

Establishing a coordination mechanism similar to the technical working group that incorporates international and national stakeholders and civil society actors can enhance collaborative efforts. Coordination mechanisms such as the SSR Steering Committee and IAG facilitate

the harmonisation of policies and programmes to prevent duplication, waste and competition.<sup>50</sup>

Thus coordinating SSR initiatives, at strategic and technical levels,<sup>51</sup> should further promote systematic application of policy instruments to achieve coherence and effectiveness within a specified strategic framework.<sup>52</sup>

Before the outbreak of COVID-19, the AU's Peace and Security Department planned to deploy a security sector reform expert to map out interventions and assist in the establishment of a national coordination mechanism. This would be a key step to enhancing the pace in SSR and subsequently address coordination challenges in building the government's capacity.

Long-term, the AU's efforts to promote increasing coordination among SSR players in The Gambia could help achieve the desired effectiveness and sustainability of the country's SSR Strategy, particularly through showcasing commitment to strengthening national ownership.

## Conclusion

Implementing effective and sustainable SSR in the aftermath of 22 years of autocracy means that this process is complex by nature. But having multiple actors and initiatives in The Gambia makes this even more complex.

Moreover, the slow development of the policy frameworks and the rejection of the Draft Constitution shows government's challenges in providing strategic direction. The ongoing coordination problems that have resulted in a piecemeal approach further muddy the waters.

Despite this complexity, significant trends and milestones in the process can be identified. Key achievements in the reforms include putting into operation previously defunct civilian oversight bodies and the restructuring of the intelligence agencies.

The recent endorsement of the SSR Strategy could be an important step in clarifying the country's strategic priorities, thus guiding clear entry points, particularly for international implementation partners. Also, enhancing coordination mechanisms would help resolve the issues of sequencing and prioritising that have perpetuated the current piecemeal approach.

Without a new Constitution, however, the future of SSR in The Gambia remains in limbo.

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