Journal of Security Sector Management

Published by:
Cranfield Security Sector Management Team
Cranfield University
Shrivenham, UK

ISSN 1740-2425

Volume 6 Number 2 – July 2008

Reverse Stakeholder Mapping: On the Need for Actor-Based SSR Strategizing in Post-Conflict Environments

Erwin van Veen

Introduction

Immediate post-conflict environments are complex, fluid and risky.[1] A plethora of short and longer term challenges jostle for priority. Basic human needs must be met, stability and the rule of law restored and trade must recommence. In addition, all of this must happen in a relatively short period if a peace agreement is to be used to best advantage (Ashdown, 2007, 67-95). At the same time, the groundwork must be laid for activities that will last for decades. Infrastructure must be rebuilt, institutions recreated, legislation put in place, capacity built and economic stability returned (for instance: Junne and Verkoren, 2005; Klingebiel, 2006). The assistance of the international community is nearly always required to meet the substantial challenges of early recovery and subsequent longer-term development.[2]

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[1] Peace agreements tend to be perceived as the end of conflict. Yet they are more appropriately viewed as the starting point of a tentative peace that will require numerous further arrangements and deals.

An area that tends to be in most urgent need of change and engagement is the security sector. Yet this is also a most sensitive and politically charged matter in the immediate post-conflict environment (Schnabel and Ehrhart, 2005; OECD, 2007). Those who command the ability to re-engage in violent conflict will not easily agree to its surrender, regulation or dilution. Worse, in the immediate aftermath of conflict there are often many kinds of armed actors with this capability – all with varying interests, relative weights and attitudes. These characteristics of the security sector simultaneously call for a strategic approach to its management and make any such endeavor difficult.

From this perspective the article argues that the *reverse* use of stakeholder mapping provides donors with a useful tool to strategically manage their engagement in the security sector in post-conflict situations. Stakeholder mapping can be usefully applied (amongst other things) as a tool to analyze the political dimension of the change required to achieve a certain strategic objective (Johnson and Scholes, 2001, 165-168, 184). Instead of mapping the field of stakeholder influence based on such an objective, *reverse* stakeholder mapping identifies strategic objectives based on what actor-mapping shows is feasible - within a broad understanding of general objectives. The article starts with discussing four characteristics of the post-conflict environment that make the formulation of strategic objectives a difficult undertaking for Security Sector Reform (SSR). It will be demonstrated that much of the post-conflict complexity stems from the wide range and nature of local actors present. For this reason, the article proposes an actor-based approach as an alternative method for strategizing donor engagement in post-conflict settings. It introduces reverse stakeholder mapping as an appropriate tool for this purpose. The article ends with a brief discussion of its requirements and how it can be combined with more substantive approaches for SSR engagement.

Post-Conflict Complexity and its Difficulties for Strategic Planning

The essential purpose of strategy is to set a long-term direction and to focus organizational resources accordingly. It can be defined as: ‘the manner in which an understanding of the environment, available resources and the means to organize and apply these resources are brought together in order to achieve stated objectives’ (derived from Macnamara and Fitz-Gerald, 2002: 8-9). The general objectives of donor strategies in the field of post-conflict SSR have been collectively stated by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization on Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Its handbook on security and justice states that SSR aims for the effective and sustainable provision of security and justice, which is delivered under transparent and accountable governance in a locally owned manner (OECD, 2007, 21).[3] Clearly, support to the delivery of these broad and sweeping aims in any given environment requires a strategy. This, in turn, demands that they are coherently 1) operationalized (which includes ensuring their local appropriateness, relevance and a realistic timeline for delivery); 2) supported by resources and 3) a view on how to use those. In the immediate post-conflict security sector the first action is highly problematic, which is demonstrated below by discussing five characteristics of this sector in relation to some attributes of donor organization and engagement. Resources tend to be generally available, at least in the short run,[4] and in the immediate post-conflict environment donor funding often exceeds local absorption capacity. Donors and international organizations do not usually lack a view on how to use such resources, yet it is not desirable that significant resources are committed based on non-existing or ill-defined strategic objectives (for instance: Easterly, 2006, 65-108).

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[2] This is not a recent insight: Japan’s and Western-Europe’s rapid post-World War II recovery can to a large extent be credited to the Marshal plan.

The first characteristic of the post-conflict security sector environment that makes it difficult for donors to set strategic objectives is the variation in the availability of security on the ground. Security in the post-conflict environment is patchy and volatile. Despite having signed a peace agreement, armed actors may continue to use violence in a limited fashion in some areas (for example: Prunier, 2005, 176-184). In addition, previous criminalization of the conflict may continue to result in widespread insecurity and in the worst case this reignites the conflict and results in the breakdown of the peace agreement itself. To some extent, the events in Darfur provide an example hereof (ICG, 2007). As a result, pacification is likely to occur in an incremental and uneven manner (Law, 2006, 2) which raises important questions for donors that complicate the formulation of strategic SSR objectives. For example: where should SSR efforts first contribute to enhancing security? How will this impact on security in other areas or on wider reconstruction efforts? How can SSR programs that contribute to immediate stabilization be balanced with programs that aim to bring about long term improvements in efficiency and governance?

A second characteristic is the wide range and nature of local actors involved in the creation of (in)security.[5] For example, there tends to be a bewildering array of, and complexity between, state and non-state actors. In turn, these categories are also very diverse in themselves. Whilst state actors tend to be the focus of donor SSR efforts, non-state actors in fact often are the principal providers of security and justice (Baker and Scheye, 2007, 512-514b). Naturally, all these actors have different motives and are sensitive to different incentive structures (Salomons, in: Junne and Verkoren, 2005, 21-22). There will be security actors who are keen to contribute positively to SSR efforts and yet there will also be spoilers and warlords, whom the status quo ante served just perfectly. Donors are not generally known to appreciate the complexities of such diversity particularly well, let alone to be able to harness it through comprehensive strategies for post-conflict SSR efforts (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2006). In addition, the reputation and credibility of this range of local actors varies significantly (Law, 2006, 3). None of them is likely to have an untainted reputation as all will somehow have been party to the conflict. Yet local participation is critical to the success of any SSR endeavor. As a result, selection matters and the notion of local ownership must be carefully unpacked to avoid jeopardizing the perceived legitimacy of SSR efforts upfront. This raises important questions for donors that complicate the formulation of strategic objectives. These include; which local actors should be involved? Which ones should be isolated? What carrots should be made available to encourage local actors on board? How can a strategy combine the long-term desire for a state to have a monopoly on the use of force with the realization that, in the first decade of reconstruction, this is not feasible in most cases?

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[3] This presumes that 1) SSR in the post-conflict environment requires substantial donor involvement (which does not always need to be the case as for instance the DDR program in Ethiopia in the nineties has shown), 2) donor agencies seek to contribute *strategically* to SSR and 3) their strategic objectives and tools are focused on the environment they work in rather than on their own organizations.

[4] Long-term reconstruction costs tend to vastly exceed initial estimates. As a consequence, insufficient resources might be available in the longer run (Chand and Coffman, 2008).

[5] Five ideal types can be distinguished: 1) citizens; 2) local authorities; 3) central authorities; 4) non-state actors (who represent a range in themselves, for instance: NGO's, private militia's, neighborhood guards, taxi associations and private security companies); and 5) the international community.

A third characteristic of the post-conflict security sector environment that complicates setting strategic objectives is the wide range of competing security needs and perspectives. It is by no means a given that the security needs and perspectives of the aforementioned actors are identical or even reconcilable (in fact, the key aim of some actors may well be to continue to provide insecurity rather than security).[6] For instance, whereas the state might have a strong agenda for centralizing the provision of security, citizens may be better off when the state enables decentralized solutions. The state could for instance regulate the provision of security by non-state actors or partially outsource it to public-private partnerships (USAID, 2007, 24-27). Obviously, the feasibility hereof would much depend on the quality of regulation that can be achieved, and whether the state commands any capability to intervene in the last resort. In addition, evidence suggests that many actors are simultaneously providers and customers of security, citizens and private companies provide good examples (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2006, 8-17). It is not an easy task to create a transparent and fair system of the rule of law when such roles and interests coincide (Baker and Scheye, 2007, 518-523). Finally, the security needs of the international community are not necessarily identical to local needs. For instance, current attempts to create a strong Afghan national army probably result more from a donor desire for a swifter exit strategy, and for having a local ally in the war on terror, than from Afghan national security needs and possibilities (Hayfa, 2006, 35-37; Middlebrook and Peake, 2008, 5). This raises equally important questions that complicate the formulation of strategic objectives. For example, whose security should be the focus of SSR efforts? Are the needs and objectives of different actors in fact compatible? How should they be prioritized or balanced in any given strategy?

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[6] It needs to be recognized that quite a few actors that are often referred to in the singular are in fact not unitary actors. It would for instance be closer to reality to portray the state as being made up of a wide variety of political, bureaucratic and perhaps even business elites. These do not form a coherent whole but rather consist of a variety of rival factions, groupings and actors – each with their own agenda. Some of them will be willing to engage in SSR with donor support, some of them will not. The challenge for donors then becomes to be able to identify local champions within such a spectrum of actors.

A fourth characteristic that makes it difficult for donors to set strategic objectives in the immediate post-conflict environment is its fluidity and volatility. Strategic objectives by definition have a fairly long time horizon, yet the immediate post-conflict environment changes quickly. One of the reasons hereof is the low level of trust caused by a history of conflict (for legacy effects of civil war: Collier et al., 2003; also: Addison, 2003, 1-3). As a result, single events may turn situations of potential instability into crises or open conflict, thereby undermining longer-term development (Specker, 2008, 3). In the case of SSR activities and programs, this is particularly relevant because the security sector has a unique capacity to wreak destruction. Beneficiaries of SSR activities might change sides overnight or overreact to marginal political events and thereby cause political upheaval that may impede further support. Important questions for donors include how to avoid strategic objectives becoming outdated by environmental changes, and how to balance the long-term need for strategic objectives with the short-term need for flexibility.

In sum, the generic objectives of SSR require context-specific operationalization to enable effective strategizing. However, the complexity of the immediate post-conflict environment makes it difficult and hazardous to do so meaningfully.

Why Strategic Objectives Must Follow Actors

A large part of this complexity is in fact caused by the wide range and nature of local (security) actors. Section 1 already highlighted this observation, and below it is explored in more detail. Local actors in more stable development settings differ from actors in post-conflict settings in at least two important ways that influence how donors can best formulate strategic objectives. First, the capacity and voice that local actors require to meaningfully express local priorities, which at least reflect those of their own interest group, are likely to be less available and more unequally distributed in post-conflict settings than in more stable development settings. In more stable development environments, for instance, a functioning state (even in a rudimentary fashion) is likely to create a more even playing field for acquiring capacity and expressing dissent than a fragile state. In fact, those actors in a post-conflict situation that can express their priorities most powerfully may only partially represent those they claim to. A good example is how the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudanese People’s Liberation

Movement (SPLM) have positioned themselves as the sole representatives of respectively the North and the South of Sudan. Clearly, the political and ethnic reality on the ground is vastly different and demands much more nuance (for example, Young, 2006). As a result, to base strategic SSR objectives on the wishes or agenda of those actors capable of interacting with donors can be risky and inadequate. Donors need to be able to identify the relevant range of local actors, not just the accessible range. Of the relevant local actors, they must be able to identify drivers, agendas, credibility and their degree of representation.

Second, in more stable development situations, donors can partially infer meaningful strategic objectives, and surmise which issues matter most, from a generally prevailing view on where society is heading under the assumption that the majority of local actors broadly subscribes to it. In the post-conflict context, this is not possible because distrust and polarization between actors will have increased. Because of the recent conflict, their incentives will have been altered, and previously existing mechanisms for reconciling and coordinating different points of view will have broken down or fallen into disrepute. A generally accepted view on what is good for society will have to be re-formed through processes of transformation and reconstruction. Because such commonality can no longer be assumed, donors will have to lower their level of analysis to individual actors.

Since donors can no longer rely on two-way interaction between local actors and their constituencies, nor on the appropriate functioning of institutions and mechanisms that used to collect, reconcile and express the objectives of the spectrum of local actors, they lack a reference framework for estimating how realistic and appropriate their desired strategic SSR objectives are. The ability to identify the aims of individual actors and to assess their potential to function as drivers of positive societal change thus assumes an even greater salience and centrality than in more stable development situations (DFID, 2004, 2005a, 2005b; Dahl-Østergaard et al., 2005; De Zeeuw, Van de Goor and Verstegen, 2005; CRU and Unsworth, 2007).[7] Donor SSR strategies and objectives will have to take shape based on emerging insights into the purpose and agenda of key local actors.

Using the Stakeholder Matrix to Strategize SSR Engagements

Re*verse* stakeholder mapping provides a tool to chart the actor-landscape and slowly navigate it. It enables the identification of realistic and meaningful strategic SSR objectives based on the actor information it generates. Such charting and identification of objectives includes whom they benefit, who may contribute to their realization and what sort of scenario planning may anticipate future environmental changes. This section first discusses the purposes of such an undertaking and inventories its requirements. Next, it shows how it can be used complementary to more substantive SSR programming approaches, like ‘multilayering’ and ‘from project to program’ (Baker and Scheye, 2007; Ball, Scheye and Van de Goor, 2007). Finally, it draws out some of its implications.

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[7] It originated from the realization that the political and institutional factors that shape development outcomes are not generally well understood (also: Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Ha Joon Chang, 2003).

‘Stakeholder mapping is a useful tool for analyzing the political context in which strategies are developed’ (Johnson and Scholes, 2001, 184). It is precisely the political nature of SSR that makes reverse stakeholder mapping so useful for SSR strategy formulation. Within the broad remit of SSR as defined by the OECD/DAC, the purpose of reverse stakeholder mapping is to uncover the priorities of different stakeholders relevant for SSR and to understand their political interplay (Ibid, 165). Based on early mapping insights, donors can realize quick wins through small scale support to local champions for change. Such first insights also create a platform for trial and error (using pilot projects for instance) (OECD, 2007, 35). Next, longer-term, trend-generating mapping in combination with accumulating feedback and experience will create insights that can be used to slowly define strategic SSR objectives (for instance: Easterly, 2006, 5-7). In this way, reverse stakeholder-mapping functions as a growing repository of knowledge that feeds the (pre-) inception phase of SSR engagements (OECD, 2007, 34; Ball, Scheye and Van de Goor, 2007, 16-17). It should also facilitate the sequencing of activities. However, because the normal point of departure for stakeholder mapping is a fairly stable environment in which strategic objectives have already been defined, its reverse use is rather more difficult in several ways.

First, in the absence of a strategic objective it is critical to have a criterion that can be used to select relevant SSR *stakeholders* (as opposed to actors). In line with Baker and Scheye, it appears appropriate to consider citizens as the prime customers of security (Baker and Scheye, 2007, 512-514). Hence, a useful criterion for differentiating actors from stakeholders is the degree to which they influence the (in)security of citizens (i.e. street security). The best way to find out logically seems to ask citizens themselves.[8] Apart from having the benefit of mapping stakeholders on the basis of how their relevance is perceived locally – rather than on the basis of more normative, Western-biased views – this also provides ample room for the mapping of non-state actors as critical providers of security and justice (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2006). It will require extensive field research (for example qualitative interviews and neighborhood surveys).

Second, the influence of stakeholders on strategic SSR objectives to-be-defined needs to be assessed by somewhat different criteria. Regular stakeholder mapping uses the dimensions of power and interest to assess and compare stakeholders for this purpose (Johnson and Scholes, 2001, 166-167). Insofar as the power dimension is concerned, some important considerations need to be born in mind. Power in corporate, Western environments can generally be considered legitimate and value neutral due to existing regulation and government control. Power in the post-conflict environment is a more difficult concept because an 'as is' situation often runs parallel to a 'to be' situation. The 'as is' situation usually represents the status quo at the end of the conflict. It does not take into account how actors have acquired their power or how it is perceived in terms of legitimacy. The 'to be' situation is normally defined in a peace agreement.[9] Power sharing, wealth sharing and security arrangements can unleash powerful forces for change, especially because donors tend to allocate funds for post-conflict reconstruction in accordance with such agreements.[10] As a result of this non-neutrality of power, and in the absence of well defined strategic objectives in the post-conflict environment, it is proposed to transform the interest dimension of regular stakeholder mapping into a 'credibility' dimension. Credibility largely determines which actors and what power can be effectively harnessed to SSR purposes. Actor-assessments against this credibility dimension must consider two considerations: 1) what reputation does the actor have because of its actions and attitude during the conflict, and: 2) what is the current stance of the actor towards security, stability and SSR at large? When the power/interest matrix is adapted accordingly, figure 1 can be obtained:

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[8] There is an interesting parallel here with Easterly’s plea for creating a stronger ’searcher’ culture and mechanisms in development cooperation (Easterly, 2006).

Figure 1: Stakeholder mapping for SSR purposes in post-conflict environments: the power/credibility matrix

		CREDIBILITY	
		Low	High
POWER	Low	A Actors with low power & low credibility (ignore)	B Actors with low power & high credibility (reinforce capability)
	High	C Actors with high power & low credibility (neutralize or incentivize)	D Actors with high power & high credibility (engage)

Source: adapted from Johnson and Scholes, 2001, 167. Note that all stakeholders listed must have the ability to influence the security of citizens to a significant degree.

It can be used to create and update 'typical' stakeholder maps (Johnson and Scholes, 2001, 175). These provide insight into which local actors in

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[9] It is notable that negotiated settlements have become the prevalent manner in which today's conflicts are ended (HSC, 2006, 19).

[10] Southern Lebanon provides a good example. The security equation in this area changed significantly as a result of the 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli conflict. On the basis of UN resolution 1701, the Hezbollah free-state had to cede (at least at the surface) its dominance of the security space to the Lebanese Armed Forces, which in turn facilitated the return of the Lebanese state. Recent developments, however, have also made quite clear that Hezbollah will have to be accommodated within the state instead of being brought to heel by it.

the post-conflict environment might be amenable to SSR activities that benefit citizens as customers of security at the micro level.[11]
It is worth highlighting two practical applications of the tool. First, a reverse stakeholder map will quickly clarify what level of ambition is realistic for donor SSR efforts. For instance, in post-conflict environments local actors in cell D (high power, high credibility) are likely to be hard, if not impossible, to find. A reverse stakeholder map will show whether this is the case. If it is, donors may instead have to be willing to build a coalition between local actors in cells B and C to identify and realize SSR objectives. This can be a sensitive and drawn-out process without immediate results. In fact, it may also entail having to engage with rather unsavory groups (cell C) that do however, have the power to achieve results. More specifically, such a coalition requires donors to assist actors in cell C to build their reputation whilst helping actors in cell B to build capacity.[12] Observations like these help to be clear about appropriate expectations early on. In addition, they require that donor risk management strategies are closely aligned to SSR activities. Second, the tool can help donors to chart and use the full potential of non-state providers of security and justice, for example, an unintended effect of the state building agenda might be that powerful and/or credible non-state actors, whose involvement is critical to the success of SSR programs, are ignored or shifted towards cell A overtime. Adequate mapping and frequent monitoring of such actors may prevent this.

As a tool, reverse stakeholder mapping, fortunately is entirely compatible with two recent substantive programmatic approaches to SSR. For reasons of space, they are dealt with briefly. First, Baker and Scheye argue for a multilayered approach to SSR whereby donors balance engagement with local, state and non-state actors. They argue from the perspective that the quantity and quality of security and justice services as delivered to end-users matters most, whilst realizing that it is utterly fanciful to expect the post-conflict state to become their main provider in the short to medium term (Baker and Scheye, 2007). Naturally, a critical question will be with whom to engage at these different levels. In this regard, the authors themselves raise important questions about accountability, particularly when it comes to using non-state actors for the provision of security and justice (such as commercial companies or civil guards; Ibid, 518-522). The power/credibility matrix can provide important clues on the degree to which accountability may be problematic, and what can be done about it. Using a local non-state actor with low credibility, for instance, will require stricter regulation and perhaps some capacity on the part of the state to intervene in the last resort. Public-private partnerships provide another method to balance the power and credibility of various actors with each other (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2006, 7, 16-17; USAID, 2007).

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[11] This presumes donors to have a long-term timeframe against which to expect results, sophisticated networks and partnerships (that can be activated as appropriate when insights emerge to deal with different categories of actors) and adequate human resources (able to appreciate and investigate local nuances and to adapt their engagement style accordingly).

[12] For a good analysis of some of the challenges of building capacity in fragile states: Brinkerhoff, 2007

Second, Ball, Scheye and Van de Goor make a case for an iterative approach to SSR programming with long time frames, consisting of a pre-inception, an inception and a longer-term programming phase, to 'develop and strengthen the relationship between service providers (state and non-state) and the users of those services' (Ball, Scheye and Van de Goor, 2007). An important component of the pre-inception phase (12 to 24 months) is information gathering (Ibid, 17, 20). Another important component is to build trust, relations and to initiate short-term confidence building measures as stepping stones towards longer-term programming (Ibid, 20-23). Reverse stakeholder mapping can be used for both components, for example, to gather information the authors suggest to commission field teams. Such teams can easily use the power/credibility matrix as a tool for analysis. In addition, the matrix is likely to provide quick cues on suitable parties for confidence building and how other local actors will perceive this.

Conclusion

In the immediate post-conflict environment the variation in the availability of security, the broad range and nature of security actors, their differing needs and perspectives and the volatility of the environment make it difficult for donors to identify meaningful strategic SSR objectives. A thorough understanding of local actors and their relationships is required before such objectives can be formulated. In fact, such objectives must be formulated jointly as local actors are far better positioned to undertake successful SSR activities, hence, an actor-based approach is appropriate for donor engagement in SSR. With whom to engage, in which manner and for what purpose thus become crucial questions. Decisions on these matters require time, patience, and a sound understanding of the environment. This article has argued for the use of reverse stakeholder mapping to identify local actors with whom donors can do business as a starting point for defining strategic purpose. To this end, a modified stakeholder matrix has been suggested in which power and credibility function as key mapping criteria. It has furthermore been argued that this tool can be used as part of two recent, substantive approaches to SSR programming, although the real test of the usefulness of the argument obviously lies in its application. South Africa might provide a good case study for a desk review. Why and how, for example, did the discredited – but powerful - white ruling party contribute to the creation of the South African Defence Force? Promising future-oriented case studies in support of a broad SSR strategy or program could be conducted in for instance Burundi or the DRC.

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