

CSG PAPERS

The Gradual Emergence of Second Generation Security Sector Reform in El Salvador

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

This paper is the product of a multi-year CSG research project, titled *Exploring the transition from first to second generation SSR in conflict-affected societies*. Led by CSG Executive Director Mark Sedra, the project assesses and evaluates the impact of orthodox security sector reform (SSR) programming in conflict-affected countries. Employing a common methodology, the project features original research on four case study countries: Bosnia-Herzegovina, El Salvador, Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste. The case study countries chosen each feature two broad characteristics: they are recovering from conflict and making transitions from war to peace; and they are mature cases of SSR, in that they have been subjected to at least ten years of externally supported SSR programming of some form. It is also important to note that geographical diversity played an important role in case study selection, with four distinct regions represented— Balkans, Central America, West Africa, and Asia-Pacific.

The SSR model as it is applied in war-to-peace transitions and broader state building projects is in the midst of a period of change. Over a decade of case study analysis, particularly in conflict-affected environments, has shown that the SSR model, as outlined in formative documents like the *OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform*, has had a meager record of achievement. A survey of key SSR implementation cases demonstrates a distinct conceptual-contextual gap. The principal tenets and features of the SSR model, like its holistic character, focus on governance, and human security orientation are rarely translated into practice in conflict-affected SSR settings. It can be argued that the SSR model in its fundamental form has never actually been applied as designed in conflict-affected environments, prompting many scholars and practitioners to explore new approaches seen as more viable in difficult implementation settings. This thinking is often loosely grouped under the heading of second generation SSR, involving a move to a new, more contextually attuned reform approach. This second generation SSR discourse is still nascent and ill-defined but rapidly taking form and gaining momentum.

The dominant objective that has united the still disparate second generation SSR thinking is the imperative of narrowing the conceptual-contextual gap. This discourse has already spawned some ad hoc programmatic initiatives in conflict-affected settings, often revolving around notions of empowering non-state security and justice providers as a means to build more sustainable and locally legitimate reform outcomes, or employing interim stabilization measures to help shape conditions for more conventional SSR interventions. In spite of the SSR model's mixed record, SSR stakeholders and observers are not calling for its jettisoning, but rather a refashioning of the model's core methods and good practices to make it more applicable in conflict-affected environments.

This project seeks to contribute to the gradual shift or transition in SSR policy and practice, through comparative analysis of four prominent conflict-affected SSR cases. By investigating the impact of conventional SSR and tracking entry-points for alternative approaches, the project aims to generate innovative, evidence-based insights and practical recommendations to improve SSR policy and programming in conflict-affected contexts. Importantly, the project will provide a detailed evidence base on how SSR has been applied to transform the security and justice architectures of states making war-to-peace transitions. The project will ascertain what works and does not work in the application of the orthodox SSR model, and by extension if and how a second-generation SSR approach could deliver better results in conflict-affected environments.

As already mentioned, alternative or second-generation SSR initiatives are already emerging organically in many reform contexts, thus part of the purpose of the project will be to identify these instances and investigate whether they can inform changes to the wider SSR model. On a broader level the project seeks to advance constructive dialogue on the future of the SSR model, which has come under increasing scrutiny and pressure among policy-makers, practitioners and analysts in donor and recipient states alike due to its mixed record of achievement in conflict-affected environments.

The project seeks to answer the following main research questions for each case:

1. To what extent and how have SSR efforts followed the orthodox SSR model as described in the *OECD-DAC Handbook on SSR*? In assessing SSR efforts in each case study country, how have orthodox SSR approaches succeeded and failed and why?
2. What alternative approaches or entry-points for security and justice development programs are available? Are they used, and if so, how? If not, why?

The project has produced two reports per case study country—eight in total—one for each of the aforementioned research questions. The final report of the project—the ninth in the series—will synthesize the results of the case study research, drawing conclusions about the efficacy of orthodox SSR approaches and the potential for second generation SSR ideas.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

First generation security sector reform (SSR) was implemented in El Salvador following the end of the civil war. Despite institutional reforms, Salvadoran SSR remains unfinished. Today, 12 years after the deployment of the new civilian police force, El Salvador is plagued by crime and violence. New strategies are necessary to increase the effectiveness of the security and justice sector to control crime and address insecurity, a primary objective of SSR. This paper argues that renewed SSR should address violence and crime through local initiatives that can then inform the national debate and policy-making process. In that perspective, it looks at two initiatives that were put in place in recent years to address crime and violence in El Salvador: the US Central America Regional Security Initiative and the gang truce. These efforts point to the need to rethink how security is delivered and how the state can tackle crime and violence. Most importantly, the case of El Salvador demonstrates that non-state criminal actors who play an important role in the control of communities cannot be left out of the picture when it comes to violence control and SSR. As such, donors and policy makers must rethink how to deal with those armed actors and adopt more flexible, less state-centric strategies that are more likely to bear results.

ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------------|---|
| ARENA | <i>Alianza Nacionalista Republicana</i> (Nationalist Republican Alliance) |
| CARSI | Central America Regional Security Initiative |
| CVPP | Crime and Violence Prevention Project |
| FMLN | <i>Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional</i> (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) |
| FUSADES | <i>Fundación Salvadoreña para El Desarrollo Económico y Social</i> |
| IDB | Inter-American Development Bank |
| IUDOP | <i>Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública</i> (Central American University Institute of Public Opinion) |
| MJSP | <i>Ministerio de Justicia y Seguridad Pública</i> (Ministry of Justice and Public Security) |
| NGO | non-governmental organization |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PATI | <i>Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso</i> |
| PNC | <i>Policía Nacional Civil</i> (National Civilian Police) |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| SSR | security sector reform |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |

INTRODUCTION

El Salvador presents a striking contradiction: while its peace process is considered one of the most important successes of the 1990s (Call, 2002; Neild, 2001), the country has faced a constant public security crisis since the early 2000s due to the epidemic level of crime and social violence. The end of the long civil war in 1992 brought hope to the tiny Central American country. The Chapultepec peace agreements provided the foundations for democratization and security sector reform (SSR). Indeed, the peace process was successful and the warring parties definitely renounced violence. The guerrilla coalition, the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN), became an official political party and managed to form a significant political counterweight to the *Alianza Nacionalista Republicana* (ARENA), the right-wing party closely associated with the political and business elites that were in power during the war. The progressive election of FMLN representatives at the municipal level and in the legislature in the 1990s paved the way for the election of FMLN governments led by Mauricio Funes in 2009 and Salvador Sanchez Céren in 2014.

In the security sector, the disbandment of the guerrilla and the state-sponsored paramilitary forces, the reduction of the armed forces and the limitation of their mandate to external defence, and the creation of a new civilian police force, *Policía Nacional Civil* (National Civilian Police [PNC]) addressed the core problems that led to the civil war in the first place and contributed to its duration and intensity. However, political bargains, resistance within old institutions and the authoritarian legacy undermined the SSR process and the ability of the new police force to respond to the needs of the Salvador population and ensure security and order throughout the country.

Today, 20 years after the initial deployment of the PNC in 1995, El Salvador ranks among the most violent countries in the world, and the violence shows no sign of slowing down. In 2015, the national homicide rate exceeded 100 murders per 100,000 population. 6,657 Salvadorans were killed, making it the most violent year of the last decade (Overseas Security Advisory Council, 2016). As a point of comparison, following the deployment of the PNC in 1995, high postwar homicide rates progressively declined to reach approximately 45 murders per 100,000 people in 2000. Homicide rates did peak following the implementation of repressive crime-control strategies in the early 2000s, but they did not exceed 70 homicides per 100,000 population (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2013).

The legacy of orthodox SSR

The first paper for this project, *Assessing the Impact of Orthodox Security Sector Reform in El Salvador* (Rivard Piché, 2016) argued that orthodox SSR in El Salvador was a modest

success. The reforms initially planned in the peace accords were successfully implemented and addressed some of the core issues that led to the war. However, these reforms were insufficient to ensure a true transformation of the security and justice institutions. The Salvadoran security system remains plagued by inefficient resource management, lack of transparency, and little political will to move beyond formal structures and change institutional cultures and practices. As pointed out by José Miguel Cruz (2006), the evolution of the security sector in El Salvador since 1992 has been shaped by tensions between democratization efforts, authoritarian legacy and a prevalent sense of insecurity among the population.

A lot remains to be done to ensure proper security delivery in accordance with the core principles driving SSR: effectiveness, transparency, good governance and compliance with human rights principles. The new institutions are not efficient enough to respond to unexpected change and shocks. As such, despite successive commitments from the state to address crime and insecurity, El Salvador has been unable to curb crime and social violence. Consequently, SSR has not fulfilled its ultimate objective: “to create a secure environment that is conducive to development, poverty reduction and democracy” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Development Assistant Committee [OECD-DAC], 2005:16).

Relevance of second generation SSR for El Salvador

While the first case study paper (Rivard Piché, 2016) focused on orthodox SSR in El Salvador, this second paper seeks to establish whether there is potential ground for second generation SSR in the country. Second generation SSR tries to fill the gap between the cohesive conceptual framework that constitutes SSR for most international stakeholders and the specificities of the environment of intervention. From this perspective, SSR is more flexible and less state-centric, emphasizing the incremental nature of the reform process, and the necessity to consider non-state actors, informal arrangements and bottom-up dynamics in the elaboration and the implementation of SSR.

Second generation SSR has often been reflected upon in contexts where the state is particularly weak, and where non-state actors and/or informal arrangements have historically played a significant role in policing, security and justice. Analyses of SSR and state building in Afghanistan and Sub-Saharan African countries, such as Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone, are often the source of the main criticisms against orthodox SSR.

Those environments are hardly similar to El Salvador, however. One can argue that El Salvador has weak capacities that limit its ability to provide services to its population (see, for example, Richani, 2010). Yet the situation in El Salvador cannot be compared to

collapsed states where there is virtually no central governing authority. El Salvador has functioning health and education systems, it maintains and develops its infrastructures, and it provides a relatively wide range of services to its population, at least in comparison to many fragile states. Electricity, water and sanitation are common even in poor neighbourhoods, at least in urban settings. Gaps and inadequacies in service provision certainly exist and are even common, but El Salvador is better off than many countries targeted by SSR.

Nonetheless, second generation SSR is relevant to and applicable in El Salvador. As pointed out in the first paper (Rivard Piché, 2016), the Salvadoran reform process remains unfinished, and new points of entry are necessary to increase the effectiveness of security and justice institutions and address insecurity. While SSR is no longer part of the discourse on security and justice by the Salvadoran government and donors, second generation SSR presents interesting potential to link state capacity-building efforts to violence reduction initiatives and broader socio-economic measures. This paper presents some violence reduction initiatives that have been put in place in El Salvador over the last 10 years and examines how they represent potential entry points for renewed SSR.

This paper discusses how second generation SSR can contribute to violence reduction, crime control and democratization efforts in El Salvador. It first gives an overview of the evolution of violence and public security policies and priorities since the mid-1990s. It then discusses current efforts that have been put in place by local, national and international stakeholders to reduce violence and improve the capacity of the state to provide security to its population in a transparent, accountable and effective manner. Third, it articulates some recommendations toward the elaboration of a second generation SSR model, and how these initiatives can be linked to capacity building in the security and justice sectors in order for the state to provide security to its population in a transparent, accountable and effective manner.

THE EVOLUTION OF CRIME, VIOLENCE AND SECURITY IN EL SALVADOR

Crime trends and popular perception

The end of the civil war in El Salvador marked the beginning of a new chapter in the country's history. The peace settlement led to unprecedented optimism and great expectations for the future of the country. However, popular enthusiasm was quickly tempered by the perceived climate of insecurity. In 1994, opinion surveys by the *Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública* (Central American University Institute of Public Opinion [IUDOP]) revealed that 15.7 percent of the population felt the government should prioritize fighting crime. By 1999, that percentage had increased to 44.7 percent (Cruz, 2003: 30). Ellen Moodie (2010) discusses how, in the 1990s, the graphic media coverage of violence

occurred daily, feeding popular perception. Those images are still present today; homicides, corruption and other crimes are papered on every day and compose the bulk of the information conveyed by mainstream media. Salvadoran journalists, such as the investigation team composing the *Sala Negra* (black room) of the online newspaper *El Faro*, make a living reporting solely on crime and violence. The reporting quality certainly varies, but social violence and crime have been part of the Salvadoran daily life for more than two decades now.

When it comes to data, violent crime quickly replaced political violence after the end of the war. Homicides first peaked between 1994 and 1997. While there is still no consensus on the numbers, homicide rates reached a minimum of 80 per 100,000 population during those years (Cruz, 2006: 152). The UNODC reports homicide rates up to 139 per 100,000 population for the same period. After a decline from 1998 to 2001, homicide rates increased again in 2002. Since then, rates have varied between 60 and 70 homicides per 100,000 population, making El Salvador one of the most violent countries in the region and the world. The successive ARENA governments adopted repressive measures (*Mano Dura*, *Super Mano Dura*) to tackle crime and violence, systematically arresting alleged gang members during large crackdown operations. However, the resources allocated to those strategies did not match the discourse of the Salvadoran government (Rivard Piché, 2016). Crackdown on gangs fed violence and clogged up the justice system (Cruz, 2011). Young men would be arrested and released shortly after, in the absence of evidence to prosecute them. Some of those gang members were arrested several times, reinforcing frustration against the state and links between local cliques¹ across the country.

Murder numbers experienced a short interlude in 2012 and 2013, following the conclusion of a truce between the two main gangs of the country, the *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13) and the Barrio 18 (Katz and Amaya, 2015: 5). Homicides dropped by approximately 40 percent until the collapse of the truce in early 2014. Homicide numbers increased again in late 2013 when it became clear that none of the candidates for the coming presidential elections (in February 2014) would support the truce.

2015 was particularly violent. The gangs and the police increasingly targeted one another, and there has been a surge in extrajudicial methods to eliminate gang members (Daugherty, 2015a; 2015b). In March, President Sanchez Céren gave the right to police officers to shoot to kill during operations (Gagne, 2015). In a context where disciplinary mechanisms are under resourced and overwhelmed by the number of cases, impunity has become the rule. Even though the inspectorate office (*Inspectoría General de la PNC*) was transferred from the PNC to the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (*Ministerio de Justicia y Seguridad Pública* [MJSP]) in 2014 (Melara, 2013), the institution remains virtually unable to process complaints and prosecute police officers who committed offences in service.

Despite the urgency of the situation, little has been done in practice to curb violence. The government presented its public security plan, *El Salvador Seguro*, in early 2015, which proposes spending US\$2.1 billion over five years on violence prevention and crime control. Considering the severe financial constraints on public spending, the government intends to pay for its plan through a five percent surcharge on cellphone services (Ellis, 2015). The plan has been criticized for its level of abstraction, and the lack of a clear time line and implementation strategy. In fact, over the last two years, three other plans² have been presented to tackle violence, promote social justice and foster economic development. Together, those plans list 200 lines of action, but there is very little coordination and coherence between them. The reports do show a new interest in proposing holistic solutions to crime and violence in the country, but there is no continuity or sense of priority between the reports or their recommendations. These issues affect funding; limited resources and no consensus about what should constitute the national priority in order to ensure political stability and development prevent progress.³

Long-term external partners of El Salvador share those concerns. They remain skeptical of the capacity of the Salvadoran security and justice system to face crime and violence, due to “a fragile human rights protection system; an out-dated electoral system; a highly polarized political culture; a cumbersome, centralized state apparatus; and a lack of capacities to negotiate and resolve social conflicts” (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2016). More than two decades after the initial implementation of SSR, experts call for “incrementally augmenting and reforming security institutions” to reduce sustainably criminal violence and gang activity (Ellis, 2015).

From national to citizen security

Despite this worrisome overview of crime and violence, the importance of a people-centred approach to security and justice is increasingly recognized within civil society and at the state level, at least on paper. In Central America, including El Salvador, the democratization process slowly moved the focus away from state security toward public security and then citizen security. Today, citizen security is a key term in official discourses, policies and road maps of most local and international organizations involved in crime prevention and violence reduction activities. In El Salvador specifically, experts interviewed for this paper agree that the current administration has shown more support for citizen security, prevention and socio-economic issues than any of its predecessors. This comprehensive approach does not excuse the lack of transparency and coherence, but it does suggest that there is at least a window of opportunity to discuss alternative approaches to improve security in the country. Furthermore, since the government relies heavily on donors to fund prevention initiatives,⁴ it offers leverage to international stakeholders to push for new approaches to SSR. Citizen security provides an anchor to tie

second generation SSR to current violence prevention programs, both at the local and the national level, to promote accountability, transparency, service-based security and human rights.

Informal actors, violence and crime

As touched on earlier, customary and traditional mechanisms of policing and justice never played a role in security and justice in El Salvador, at least not like in Sub-Saharan Africa or in Southeast Asia. However, informal and criminal actors have historically been part of the security environment in El Salvador. During the war, the government often relied on paramilitary organizations to perpetrate killings against political opponents and civilian populations allegedly supporting the guerrillas. Right-wing death squads also conducted targeted assassinations and participated in mass massacres, while neighbourhood watch groups were involved in repression and coercion along political lines. Hence, before 1992, informal actors more or less related to state authorities played an important role in the protection of political and economic interests.

After the war and despite reforms, some of those organizations remained partially active. Some problematic units from the former police forces were integrated without proper vetting in the new PNC, perpetuating an institutional culture permitting corruption and cronyism (Costa, 1995). Furthermore, the perceived incapacity of the PNC to address crime and provide security led to the re-emergence of death squads during the 1990s. The best-known example is the *Sombre Negra*, a shadow group composed of PNC officers and local businessmen in the city of San Miguel, which killed notorious criminals following the perceived inaction of the PNC (Amnesty International, 1996). The trial of some of its most influential members attracted a lot of popular attention in the second half of the 1990s. Anecdotes of death squads have resurfaced periodically since, usually in periods of acute insecurity (see Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010: 197-211).

Today, gangs are also important actors when it comes to social order and security, especially at the local level. Over time, cliques associated with either of the two main gangs have solidified their control over certain communities, usually in marginalized areas, implementing protection and extortion rackets. From the mid-2000s, newspapers reported how households suspected of being associated with a rival group would be forced out of their house and their community by the local gang (see, for example, Meléndez, 2013a). My own research shows that cliques can control access to services, including schools, mills, markets and buses (Rivard Piché, forthcoming; Martinez, 2013a). In other words, some cliques have enough power to regulate daily life and produce informal social order, making them a central actor in the administration of communities throughout the country. In certain spaces, they have more control and authority than the state itself.⁵ How

communities perceive local cliques varies, usually based on whether gang members, and especially leaders, originally come from the community.⁶ While some reinsertion programs for gang members exist, those initiatives are usually led by civil society at the local level since international donors and the Salvadoran government are reluctant to engage with criminal actors.

This section laid out the evolution of security and violence in El Salvador since 1992. It identified key challenges for renewed SSR and highlighted opportunities for an alternative approach to the reform of the security and justice system. Considering that “the fundamental objective of SSR is to make people feel safer” (UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations 2012: 5), the next section looks at some violence prevention initiatives that have been put in place in the last 10 years and current potential approaches for second generation SSR in El Salvador.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO SSR IN EL SALVADOR

SSR per se has never truly been part of the policy discussion in El Salvador. As highlighted in the first paper on assessing orthodox SSR, reforms occurred prior to the initial articulation of SSR in 1998 and its development as a policy framework in the 2000s (Rivard Piché, 2016). As part of the broader negotiated peace process, the reform of the Salvadoran security and justice institutions was one of the first endeavours of the sort, and it inspired quite significantly UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in the redaction of *An Agenda for Peace* (De Soto, 2013).

The country’s security and justice reforms are discussed widely in the policy and academic literature published in the 1990s and the early 2000s due to attention given to the peace process. However, there is little emphasis on SSR in more recent scholarship and policy documents on El Salvador. From 2005, most of the discussion switched toward violence and crime. Nonetheless, when we look more closely at the different programs put in place by the Salvadoran government and its international partners since the mid-2000s, we realize that several initiatives present some similarities with SSR’s objectives. They provide interesting points of entry for alternative and context-driven SSR. Renewed SSR efforts would have to focus first and foremost on crime control and violence reduction since it represents the single most important problem currently faced by the country.

This section presents two initiatives that have been implemented by domestic and international actors to reduce violence and control crime over the last 10 years. These accounts are in no way exhaustive, but the initiatives represent good examples of alternative approaches SSR could take to address the current challenges faced by El Salvador. First, international partners, including the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the UNDP, have implemented violence prevention programs in

collaboration with Salvadoran counterparts at the national and local levels. While these initiatives have not been systematized countrywide, they have reduced violence, crime and insecurity in specific communities. Second, the gang truce brokered in 2012 has been the most effective strategy of the last 10 years to reduce homicides – its effect was immediate and significant. However, some experts argue that such a strategy can increase violence in the long run (Katz and Amaya, 2015: 7; Klein, 1997). Nonetheless, it was an unprecedented opening toward a segment of the Salvadoran population that is both the main perpetrator and victim of violence: the homicide rate for men between 15 and 29 years old in El Salvador exceeds 200 per 100,000 population (UNDP, 2012). These two very different initiatives can provide some important insights for renewed SSR.

Violence prevention programs: the case of USAID

Most donors and international agencies working with the Salvadoran government in the security and justice sectors divide their activities between different pillars. For example, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) focuses on governance in the public sector and citizen security and justice. Issues of governance, security and social justice tend to be covered by different programs. Nonetheless, there is a growing understanding among donors and national stakeholders that reducing crime and social violence requires a double strategy: developing security and justice governance, access to justice and security delivery on the one hand, and promoting socio-economic development on the other hand.

El Salvador and the United States share a privileged relationship due to historical cooperation and political affinities (Ellis, 2015). Since 2008, El Salvador has received assistance through the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) led by the US Department of State to curb violence and improve security delivery (US\$642 million since 2008). As a regional initiative, CARSI pursues three main objectives: assisting law enforcement and security forces in crime fighting, strengthening the security and justice sectors of Central American countries, and preventing crime and violence through social programs at the national and local levels (US Department of State, 2014).

In El Salvador and under the CARSI umbrella, USAID put in place in 2013 the Crime and Violence Prevention Project (CVPP) (USAID, 2015). The five-year project has a budget of US\$24.8 million and works with the MSPJ and local partners to develop national and local strategies to reduce crime and violence in high-risk communities distributed across 55 municipalities (USAID, 2015).

Local ownership, crime and politics

One of the core objectives of the CVPP is to help the Salvadoran government to put in place the national crime and violence prevention strategy at the local level in targeted

communities prone to crime and gang activity. At the local level, USAID funds the development of local youth community centres, the rehabilitation of public spaces and vocation training programs such as the *Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso* (PATI), which will be discussed later. USAID works with the MJSP and municipal authorities to implement these projects. Through its local partners, USAID also engages with religious figures, community leaders and civil society.

However, USAID refuses to work directly with the gangs because they are considered criminals. This position is not unique to USAID. An expert from the IDB states that violence prevention programs “are not intended to work for the gangs; they are intended to work for the youth and guys that are almost gang members.”⁷ However, donors cannot always supervise or limit who accesses local projects. As pointed out by a senior researcher from the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (*Fundación Salvadoreña para El Desarrollo Economico y Social* [FUSADES]), a lot of programs are considered preventive, but they included gang members.⁸ Considering their number and their influence in at-risk communities targeted by the CVPP and other similar projects, segregating gang members is hardly feasible.

The PATI clearly illustrates these difficulties. It was developed and implemented in 2013 in six municipalities that had been declared “free of violence” as part of the truce process. The objective of the PATI was to provide additional income (US\$100 per month) to vulnerable households to get vocational training and access the job market. The program was initially supposed to target youth and single mothers. However, during its implementation in certain municipalities, bargaining between the municipal authorities, gang leaders who were participating in local peace processes, and other community representatives (police commanders, religious figures, community leaders) enabled gang members to access the program. In April 2013, the then Vice Minister of Public Security in charge of violence prevention, Douglas Moreno, announced that the program would target 400 persons in Ilopango, including 200 gang members (100 from the MS-13 and the Barrio 18 respectively).

However, once PATI was implemented, all participating households were related to the local gangs, and the program directly funded 750 gang members (Meléndez, 2013b). Gang leaders even approved and signed off on the finalized list of participants. National newspapers quickly uncovered that PATI was funding local gang members (*El Faro*, 2013). USAID shut down the program in September 2013. An employee of the USAID’s country office indicated in an interview that PATI was a complete failure, specifically because the gangs had manipulated it for their own gain.⁹

Violence prevention programs such as those supported by USAID are implemented in highly political environments where cooperation with national and local partners is essential to clearly understand the needs of the community, ensure local ownership and

ultimately maximize the impact of the projects on the ground. However, the injection of new resources can also feed competition between local stakeholders and be captured by local politics. In an evaluation report on USAID's community-based crime and violence prevention approach in Central America, a team of researchers from Vanderbilt University states the following: "A number of community association and municipal crime and violence prevention committee members in [...] El Salvador reported that their efforts were hampered by political divisions between the municipal government and themselves. Specifically, whenever the mayor of the municipality was of a political party different from that of the majority of the committee members, support for the violence prevention programs would diminish" (Berk-Seligson et al., 2014: 7).

In March 2015, the FMLN won the municipal election in Soyapango, a municipality of the larger San Salvador and one of the 10 cities prioritized by the national FMLN government for violence prevention. The newly elected city council informed USAID that they would have to re-evaluate violence prevention programs that were implemented by the former administration over the past 18 months before deciding whether they would be maintained.¹⁰ It meant putting on hold USAID programs that had a positive impact on the community.

In Ilopango in 2013, the city council was led by ARENA. At that time more programs were implemented in communities supporting the ruling party than in communities affiliated to the FMLN. Political fault lines also loosely followed gang divisions in Ilopango. As such, there were more projects implemented in communities associated to the Barrio 18 than to the MS-13. Those examples illustrate how violence prevention programs are not isolated from local politics, which should be taken into consideration in the development and implementation of these initiatives.

Results and impact

So far, USAID's violence reduction programs throughout Central America appear to be effective in reducing crime and violence. Based on surveys conducted in communities targeted by these programs, the Vanderbilt evaluation report finds that residents are less likely to be aware of extortion, murders and drug sales (Berk-Seligson et al., 2014: 61). Furthermore, the fact that these projects work with a wide range of actors at all levels increases potential for inclusion and local ownership. However, it also creates coordination problems, and these initiatives are not immune to local political dynamics, which can divert resources and subvert the objectives of the programs.

Considering that successive Salvadoran governments have been more prone to invest in repression than prevention, donors play a key role in injecting the resources and stimulating political will at the local level. Nonetheless, those programs cannot be sustainable if they are not endorsed and owned by the Salvadoran authorities and if

domestic resources are not put toward them. Projects such as the CVPP also need to be expanded beyond the local level to address violence countrywide and to have a more sustainable impact on crime and violence.

The positive impact of the community-based programs for violence and crime prevention is not limited to USAID programming. A similar project funded by the UNDP in six cities across the country also showed some promising results (UNDP, 2012: 6). However, in this case, the impact is again geographically limited to communities targeted by the program. Donors need to find a way to encourage the Salvadoran government to expand local successes to the national level and develop a rigorous, realistic and affordable countrywide prevention action plan.

Implications for second generation SSR

As pointed out earlier, violence prevention initiatives represent an interesting entry point for second generation SSR since they address the most pressing issue in the country currently: violence. These programs are also usually based on principles that guide second generation SSR: people-centred, community-based processes focusing on a specific entry point – violence prevention. Nonetheless, a sustainable solution to crime and violence also passes through effective, transparent and accountable security and justice institutions. USAID (2014) recognizes that “future efforts need to marry community-based approach with law enforcement efforts in the same hot spot areas. A comprehensive and multi-sectorial approach requires prevention support to distressed communities while improving public security through trusted and accountable police.”

Going in that direction, USAID has allocated US\$21.5 million to the Justice Sector Improvement Project to professionalize the criminal justice sector, and improve procedures and practices of criminal justice, community police and judicial transparency (USAID, 2013). Local crime and violence prevention programs contribute to these objectives, while also building trust between stakeholders, including police officers, citizens and community leaders. The next section turns to an actor that is often left out of violence prevention programs, gangs, and discusses how second generation SSR in El Salvador can be articulated with efforts similar to the gang truce that was brokered in 2012.

The gang truce and violence reduction

In the past 20 years, the single most effective strategy at the national level to reduce violence in postwar El Salvador has been the gang truce between the MS-13 and the Barrio 18. The process attracted unprecedented attention from the media, the public and donors. Some have strongly denounced the very notion of negotiating with criminal actors. Most people interviewed in 2013 and 2015 have criticized the lack of transparency

that surrounded the process. Yet, others have highlighted the unquestionable effect of the process on homicide numbers. Indeed, the truce reduced homicides by 40 percent overall, but several issues remain regarding the transparency and sustainability of the process. Nonetheless, the truce demonstrates that engaging with powerful non-state actors can reduce violence and improve security, at least temporarily. As such, it presents interesting insights for an alternative approach to SSR in a context where violent crime is a destabilizing factor. Dealing with powerful criminal actors who play a key role in security can help create windows of opportunity to implement broader reforms.

The bargaining process

A lot has been said and written about the truce process in El Salvador. However, due to a lack of transparency and contradictory information provided by all parties involved, it is hard to get a clear and accurate image of how the process unfolded. The narrative that follows is based on a review of the literature on the topic, official interviews and off-the-record meetings conducted in 2013 and 2015 coupled with field observations over seven months in El Salvador between July 2012 and October 2013.

Discussions between the leadership of the two main gangs, the Catholic Church and elements of Funes' government started sometime in 2011. The main negotiators were Monsignor Fabio Colindres, a bishop of the Salvadorian Catholic Church, and Raul Mijango, former congressman and guerrillero. In March 2012, the transfer of 30 to 40 members of both gangs' leadership from the maximum prison in Zacatecoluca to regular jails across the country was followed by an immediate and significant reduction in homicides. The online newspaper El Faro first revealed the deal, presenting interviews with leaders of local cliques who had received the order to stop the killings (Martinez et al., 2012). The truce was maintained over the following months.

It is unclear when the government entered the discussions, but some experts argue that the deal brokered in March 2012 would have never been possible without the full participation of the state.¹¹ The concessions made to the gangs (prison transfers and improved detention conditions) and the second phase of the process indeed suggest state involvement. Consequently, the UNPD states in a document from 2012 that the truce was initiated on March 8 under the leadership of the Catholic Church and was facilitated by the government (UNDP, 2012: 4).

From late 2012 until May 2013, the Funes government progressively acknowledged its role in the truce process, or at least recognized the impact of the deal on homicides. On November 22, 2012, the minister of justice and public security, David Mungia Payés, held a press conference where he presented an assessment of his first year at the head of the MJSP. Upon his nomination in 2011, he promised to reduce homicides by 30 percent within the first year of his mandate. The pact enabled him to meet that objective.

During the same press conference, Raul Mijango, one of the main negotiators, announced that the truce would enter a second phase: the creation of municipalities free of violence (Rodriguez and Serrano, 2012). The first municipality to sign a peace accord would be Ilopango; gangs would hand in their weapons and commit to a zero crime policy, including homicides, extortion and kidnappings, while the PNC would cease to conduct large-scale and overnight anti-gang operations in these municipalities (Stone, 2012). In the meantime, the city council would put in place a range of development, violence prevention and reintegration programs in collaboration with the central government and international donors, including initiatives under USAID's CVPP. The negotiation of the local peace accord in Ilopango was facilitated by Douglas Moreno,¹² vice-minister of public security in charge of prevention (Sanz and Martinez, 2013).

In April 2013, the Attorney General, Luis Martinez, criticized the truce in an interview with CNN, calling the process hypocritical. President Funes responded that he could hardly see how the truce was hypocritical considering that it had resulted in a reduction of homicides of 52 percent nation-wide. Later that month, Funes announced a series of social and economic reinsertion programs, stating publicly that his government needed to answer the demands of the gangs in order to ensure the sustainability of the truce process (Martinez, 2013b). Those statements confirmed suspicions regarding the role played by the government in the process and attested to the government's increasing willingness to officially recognize the process. However, the government's public turn in favour of the truce came to an abrupt halt after the removal of Mungia Payés as minister of justice and public security in May 2013. The constitutional chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice ruled that Payés could not remain at the head of the MJSP since he was a former member of the armed forces. He had retired from his military position only days before his nomination as minister of justice and public security. Payés is considered the architect of the truce on the government side.

From the summer of 2013 onwards, official support for the truce crumbled and ARENA entered the presidential electoral campaign claiming that there would be no truce with criminals (*'no hay tregua con la delincuencia'*) once they return to power. The FMLN campaign also distanced itself from the Funes administration and the truce process. By the end of 2013, it was clear that none of the candidates would support the pact beyond February 2014. The truce collapsed shortly after.

Results and impact

Despite its numerous problems, the effect of the truce on homicides cannot be denied. While numbers vary, the truce reduced murders by 40 to 50 percent nationwide. It did not have an impact on other crimes, such as extortion or drug distribution. There are some issues with numbers, however. During the truce, newspapers reported that disappearances increased, and mass graves were found in certain communities (Bargent,

2013). Nonetheless, the phenomenon was not widespread enough to cast serious doubt on the homicide rate reduction. Furthermore, it is hard to know how many disappearances occurred during the truce since they do not constitute a crime per se, and are therefore not recorded by the PNC and other institutions of the criminal justice system.

The impact of the truce varied widely at the local level. Even in the case of the municipalities free of violence, the fruits of the truce and the local peace process were very different from one peace zone to the other. The case of Ilopango was at the forefront of the media since the local stakeholders were extremely vocal about the process. In this municipality, local cliques gave access to the communities under their control to state services and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) through the negotiation of the local peace accords (Sanz and Martinez, 2013). Those negotiations demonstrated the informal authority of the cliques at the local level, but the process also created important opportunities for the state and NGOs to reach communities that were previously too dangerous to access. It was an unprecedented occasion “to promote initiatives of socio-economic integration for young people living in contexts of vulnerability, including gang members” (UNDP, 2012: 5). In Ilopango, economic reinsertion projects were put in place in communities controlled by each gang. In the MS-13 turf, a henhouse was built at the bottom of a ravine. It created approximately 20 jobs for gang members and women of the community who plucked the chickens, which would then be sold in local shops. In Barrio 18 territory, gang members worked in bakeries and metal workshops. It is unclear, however, if the individuals employed by these projects had officially left the gang or if they were still considered members of the cliques. Furthermore, the income generated by those projects was modest. Alone, those projects could not offer a way to reinsert all gang members and generate enough income to sustain them and their families, while revitalizing their community.

During the summer of 2013, I visited soccer fields, community centres, schools and churches in different communities (*colonia* or *etapa*) of Ilopango. Two things were clear from my observations and my conversations with the local population: daily life was improving, but local cliques had a lot of power. According to members of the community who refused to be identified for security reasons, the local peace process benefited gang members and their relatives, but failed to really improve the situation for the broader population. Families were still scared that their children would be recruited or killed by the local cliques.¹³ While access to schools and other services had improved, the daily life of the people – where people shopped for food, which bus they took and which communities they could enter – remained strongly influenced by territorial lines and affiliation. The truce did reduce violence, but it did not reduce the cliques’ influence and authority over local communities.

On the contrary, due to their advantageous position following the peace accords and their ability to sit at the decision table, gangs were able to influence and direct development programs and initiatives, as described earlier in the case of the PATI. For many people, the peace process had been taken over by the gangs, serving their interests instead of those of the community as a whole. Recent developments regarding the financing of MS-13 activities support this notion. Marvin Adaly Ramos Quintanilla, a former member of the MS-13, was recently arrested and accused of being one of the gang's top financial advisers. He is known to have been involved in the truce negotiation process. Furthermore, after he was released from prison in 2013, he was hired by Ilopango's mayor's office to run the PATI program (Silva Ávalos and Avelar, 2016), demonstrating how development projects were co-opted by the gangs' leadership.

Consequently, the truce has been criticized for empowering gang members. Katz and Amaya (2015) point to the fact that truces between gangs tend to increase their level of organization and can have a boomerang effect on violence later on. The steep increase in homicides since the collapse of the truce in early 2014 supports this hypothesis. Furthermore, for many local observers, the truce reinforced gangs, giving them a public stance and legitimizing in some way their authority.

Nonetheless, it is also important to note that patterns of violence and homicides changed after the truce. Violence increased slightly in Ilopango and other former peace zones, but not as much as in other municipalities (Valencia, 2015). Local processes seem to have been sustainable enough to survive the death of the national truce. In fact, a local researcher suggested that the peace process did indeed empower and legitimize gang members in peace zones, making them responsible for the process' outcomes.¹⁴ As formalized authority figures, they had to respond to the people living in their community.

A program coordinator for the Catholic Relief Services said the truce should have never been negotiated on the basis of violence and homicides because it did not address the structural conditions that explain and reproduce violence.¹⁵ This participant indicated that several initiatives based on dialogue had been tried before, especially in prisons. A program coordinator at FESPAD¹⁶ also described how, in the 2000s, the gangs tried to establish a dialogue with the government to denounce their conditions of detention.¹⁷ Indeed, small programs to promote social justice and dialogue with gangs have existed since the early 2000s in prisons across the country. The participants felt that those programs should have been the basis for the negotiation of a truce between the gangs. However, some of those programs have been subverted by the gangs or are at least considered as such by international donors.¹⁸

Implications for second generation SSR

Despite its many weaknesses, the truce significantly reduced violence and created a unique window of opportunity to implement violence prevention programs and socio-economic development initiatives in many communities that were previously inaccessible. Nonetheless, its impact was short-lived due to the lack of transparency and a very dynamic environment. A transparent process would certainly have maximized the sustainability of the pact, maintaining a decline in violence over time and facilitating long-term investment at the local and national levels in violence prevention and social justice programs.

Nonetheless, in contexts where powerful non-state actors control territory and the state security institutions are shown to be unable to curb violence and gain authority, other approaches to deal with those actors must be considered. The gang truce in El Salvador bears important insights that can inform future attempts at reducing crime and violence in the country and elsewhere. One thing seems clear in the case of El Salvador: gangs cannot be ignored. They should be a key element of any new SSR strategy, since they are one of the main vectors of violence, but also key figures of authority in many communities. There is a clear need for a new dialogue at the country level that would bring together all national stakeholders, including gangs. Including criminal actors such as the gangs in state- and peace-building processes such as SSR does not mean that gangs should be integrated into state security forces, as is often the case with non-state armed actors in post-conflict situations. It rather refers to the notion of finding inclusive, community-based strategies to offer alternative sources of income to gang members and prevent more effectively their ability to recruit youth at risk. A combination of effective policing to target disruptive gang elements and creating the necessary socio-economic conditions to prevent recruitment and rehabilitate former gang members is at the core of second generation SSR in El Salvador and similar countries where criminal actors hold the balance of power against the state.

CRAFTING A SECOND GENERATION SSR MODEL**A second generation SSR agenda for El Salvador**

The security situation in El Salvador has evolved considerably since the end of the civil war and the initial reform of the security and justice institutions. Today, renewed SSR is unlikely if the problem of violence and crime is not first resolved. The last 20 years have taught us that the widespread perception of insecurity enables the government to adopt repressive and aggressive responses to violence. Those strategies have threatened the core principles promoted by orthodox SSR in the 1990s: civilian oversight, civil-military balance, transparency and accountability. High levels of crime and social violence have justified repressive measures, the increased use of the military in public security matters

and extrajudicial methods. Those strategies have only furthered violence and insecurity (Cruz, 2011), contributing to the vicious circle in which El Salvador is caught.

Consequently, renewed SSR cannot only seek to increase the capacity, the professionalism and the effectiveness of state institutions. As a first step, renewed SSR must address violence and crime through local initiatives that can then inform the national debate and policy-making process. Second, second generation SSR should focus on the funding of the security sector and continue to direct international assistance toward prevention while promoting more transparent and efficient resource allocation throughout the system, in line with new policies toward violence reduction and crime control.

From local initiatives to national policies

A second generation SSR agenda for El Salvador starts with violence reduction and crime control at the local and national levels. It is difficult to reform institutions that are constantly under fire. Violence in El Salvador is no longer a strictly criminal problem; it is now a social issue that requires a coherent and holistic solution.¹⁹ Yet, not everything needs to be addressed at once; re-establishing basic security is a prerequisite for broader reform in the security and justice sectors.

At the time of the truce, homicide reduction suggests that approximately 40 percent of the violence was due to the gangs. While gangs constantly adapt in response to state security measures and forms of violence change as a result, addressing the place and the role of the gangs should be part of the first steps of a new SSR strategy in El Salvador. The process certainly lacked transparency and showed important limits, but engaging with powerful criminal and/or non-state actors appears to be necessary in order to control violence, access high-risk communities and sustain results over time. Achim Wennmann (2014) shows that engaging with criminal actors to address crime and violence has been done in a wide variety of contexts. Different strategies are available. In El Salvador, the successive governments first ignored the gangs in the 1990s, and then tried to eliminate them with repressive strategies. The truce was an attempt at co-opting gangs. Wennmann also proposes to integrate criminal actors.

It is unclear whether it would be possible to negotiate a new truce and what trade-offs it would entail. However, the fact that violence remains relatively low in former peace zones such as Ilopango after 2014 suggests that it might be possible to promote more transparent local initiatives, as well as community-based violence prevention programs, such as those funded by USAID. National stakeholders and international donors should promote dialogue through their local partners in order to find adapted solutions to local conditions. Such an approach fosters trust building and social cohesion. It is not a perfect strategy, however, considering how previous similar processes were politicized and gave way to clientelism. Furthermore, in order to do so, donors such as USAID may need to review their

position toward gangs. In a context like El Salvador, refusing to engage with gangs or at least recognize their role at the local level only appears counterproductive. Donors have to be willing to change the way they traditionally operate, which may entail greater risk but is more likely to yield results.

Once these initiatives are implemented, it is important for local, national and foreign stakeholders to share the successes of local programs with Salvadoran decision makers in order to inform debates on violence reduction and crime control. Lessons learned at the local level can help policy makers to shape and implement a national response to violence.

Funding and resource allocation

Funding and resource allocation do not represent an entry point per se, but they constitute a priority for renewed SSR efforts in El Salvador. Repression through large-scale security operations has attracted most of the resources allocated to the MSJP and the PNC. A reduction in crime and violence would create space to reflect on how El Salvador can best use and allocate resources to fight crime according to a clear and flexible strategy. Donors who currently fund the bulk of prevention programs across the country should be part of the discussion and support the Salvadoran government in identifying how resources can be better allocated to undercut violence and crime. Furthermore, a national dialogue should be open about the future of the PNC and the security sector more broadly. Second generation SSR should focus on the priorities identified by a broad spectrum of actors, not only Salvadoran political parties.

To conclude, it is tempting to create a shopping list of everything that needs to be fixed in the Salvadoran security sector. However, the discussion about community-based projects and the gang truce highlights the importance of the local in addressing crime and violence in El Salvador. A significant reduction of violence would certainly remove pressure from the PNC, giving it space to rethink its mandate, develop a true doctrine and reduce the need to rely on repressive strategies. It would also create space for a reform of the prison system and the development of investigative capacities. Yet, at this stage, violence reduction should be the main priority of renewed SSR efforts in El Salvador in order to create the necessary conditions for further reforms. It would also enable SSR to reach its overarching goal: making people feel safer.

Lessons from El Salvador for SSR

SSR in El Salvador bears five important lessons for future efforts in the country and to the SSR field more broadly. While these lessons are drawn from this case study, they have also been discussed in other cases, and can therefore inform the theoretical and policy discussions about SSR.

First, technical and administrative SSR is not enough to ensure the security of people. In El Salvador, orthodox reforms did not manage to truly transform the security sector. There was certainly some progress made, such as a limitation of the role of the armed forces in public security, the creation of a new civilian police force and progressive reform within the justice system. SSR is by nature a political process that necessitates negotiations and trade-offs. Yet, after the terms of the peace accords were defined and approved by the warring parties, the terms of the reform process were never truly discussed again. SSR is a long-term process and there is a clear need to hold a national conversation on the role and the mandate of the security institutions in the face of public security challenges. This conversation cannot be limited to political parties and institutions. It must include marginalized groups from all classes and backgrounds in order to spur transformative dialogue.

Second, while SSR did increase the capacity of the security institutions to provide services, it did not develop an institutional culture that would have enabled the institutions to adapt to the changing security environment and respond to new challenges such as the gang phenomenon. Furthermore, SSR did not really tackle remaining authoritarian influences in the composition of the institutions and in the management of public security issues. All in all, SSR prevented a return to war, but key problems that led to the conflict in the first place remain: repression, aggressive strategies against so-called enemies of the Salvadoran state and marginalization of low-income communities with gang presence. Many interviewees for this study drew parallels between the leftist movements of the 1970s and the gangs today, not in terms of their nature or actions, but rather in terms of how they are portrayed by the national government. Material capacities can be addressed rather quickly, but developing a new institutional culture in the security sector requires time.

Third, orthodox SSR in El Salvador did not prioritize violence and crime control as a way to promote social, economic and political development. This lack of attention was another consequence of the short-term vision of postwar SSR. Since SSR was considered largely completed by 1995, dynamics that emerged afterwards were never taken into consideration. Furthermore, SSR was considered a success in the 1990s despite high levels of violence and crime. Democratization efforts were rather the main focus of the reforms. Yet, from the mid-1990s and especially after 2000, the response of the Salvadoran state to violence and crime challenged the democratization achievements. Extrajudicial violence, the repeated use of the military in public security, and repressive strategies challenged the principles that had guided SSR in the first place. El Salvador illustrates well how security is a prerequisite for development and democratization.

Fourth, orthodox SSR in El Salvador has demonstrated very little attention to local security and order dynamics, beyond the deployment of the PNC and the disbandment of the guerrilla between 1992 and 1995. The inability of the PNC to address the gang problem

and regain control over communities controlled by local cliques was never approached from an SSR perspective. Today, though, local violence prevention and reinsertion programs represent an interesting entry point for more context-specific and humble SSR. As discussed earlier, some of those programs have shown promising results, and the truce was the most effective strategy put forth by the state to reduce violence since the end of the war. The peace processes implemented in municipalities such as Ilopango, and the violence prevention programs that were introduced afterwards offer an alternative path to fulfill SSR's main objectives. Furthermore, lower violence means less pressure on national institutions, which can create windows of opportunity for institutional reforms at the national level.

Finally, SSR is an incremental process. It cannot address all reform challenges at once and it must prioritize certain areas to ensure the sustainability of the process. In the case of El Salvador, addressing violence and crime is the first step toward renewed SSR. Reforming institutions facing an intense public security crisis is fruitless. Instead, SSR must put in place the conditions that will allow for capacity building and the professionalization of the security sector. In addition, while SSR promotes specific norms such as accountability, transparency and respect for human rights, it is unrealistic to expect the implementation of these norms from the get-go. The previous discussion about community-based prevention projects and the truce show how local politics play a crucial role in the success of those programs. Refusing to engage with non-state actors or systematically denouncing any form of corruption can actually hamper the process. In other words, there may be tensions between the different objectives and norms promoted by SSR and the prevailing conditions on the ground that will require some trade-offs in strategies and programming.

In sum, the shortcomings of orthodox SSR in El Salvador have prevented the country's institutions from responding adequately to a situation that turned into a permanent security crisis. While there is currently no discussion at the national level about renewed SSR, crime control and violence reduction efforts point to the need to rethink how security is delivered and how the state can tackle crime and violence. More emphasis must be put on prevention and local peace processes in order to develop a strong national strategy and reduce pressure on security and justice institutions. From there, a new reform process could be undertaken, adapted to the Salvadoran reality, based on a true national consensus and lessons learned in El Salvador and abroad.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, orthodox SSR in El Salvador was a modest success. However, 20 years after the official completion of the reform process, the country is facing a severe public security crisis. The security and justice system has been unable to curb crime and violence despite aggressive rhetoric and repressive strategies. The reformed institutions have not managed to develop a culture that provides the necessary tools, expertise and flexibility to face epidemic levels of violence. The inability of the state to deal with crime has only further contributed to violence.

Based on the assessment detailed in the first paper (Rivard Piché, 2016), I argue that there is a need for renewed SSR efforts in El Salvador. However, it is essential to depart from the orthodox SSR approach to address the problems that undermine security, stability and development in the country. First and foremost, SSR must address the problem of generalized violence and crime. On the one hand, it is extremely hard to address institutional problems and discuss the long-term development and professionalization of the criminal justice system if it is constantly under fire. There is currently no space for a conversation on unfinished SSR. On the other hand, controlling armed crime and violence is a primary objective of SSR (OECD-DAC, 2007: 21). Consequently, reducing violence is the main entry point for SSR in El Salvador.

Community-based prevention programs and local peace process have showed promising results for violence reduction in El Salvador, and offer interesting insights for a second generation SSR model. Starting with what actually works at the local level could provide a more realistic and sustainable SSR strategy. Those lessons can then be adapted to the national level with the support of local, national and international stakeholders who are engaged in those community-based projects. Based on those lessons, a broader, more ambitious SSR strategy could be developed at the national level, prioritizing a national conversation on security in El Salvador and an evaluation of resources and funding available to drive change. Nonetheless, addressing violence remains the central objective since it is very unlikely that reforms at the state level could take root while the public security crisis still prevails.

El Salvador is an interesting case for SSR since its environment is unique relative to more typical conflict-affected SSR cases, such as Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Liberia or Afghanistan. However, it presents important lessons for other countries in the region that face high levels of crime and violence, widespread organized crime and weak security and justice institutions. El Salvador shows how insecurity can still prevail in a country where there is a functioning central government; in such cases, violence and crime control should be an entry point for SSR.

More importantly, though, El Salvador suggests that engaging criminal actors in context where they represent sources of power and authority is crucial to SSR. Considering that local cliques sometimes have more authority over communities than state security forces, ignoring those actors on the basis of political legitimacy or legality only means that SSR is incomplete. The SSR approach should be more flexible when it comes to non-state actors, and not limit itself to engaging legitimate political actors. It should propose various strategies to attain its core objectives rather than a shopping list based on a specific, state-centric understanding of what constitutes a country's security sector. What applies for customary arrangements in Africa is also true for criminal organizations in Central America and elsewhere: it is not about who *should* provide security and who people *should* turn to for security, but rather who *does* provide security and who people *do* turn to for security.

All in all, there is not one SSR model but rather a number of pragmatic approaches. Trying to build a unique model is fruitless and demonstrates the inability of external stakeholders to grasp the complexity and the specificities of any particular environment of intervention. We may develop a larger framework stating the core objectives of the project, but strategies remain country and time specific. SSR requires more flexibility and humility in its elaboration, not specific guidelines and detailed lists of indicators.

NOTES

1. In El Salvador, gangs are structured around local groups, called cliques or *clicas* in Spanish. They are the main unit in the gang's structure and are usually associated to a specific community or turf.
2. Besides *El Salvador Seguro*, the Sanchez Céren government also introduced *El Salvador Adelante*, which focuses on human development, and the five-year development plan *El Salvador Productivo, Educado y Seguro 2014–2019*. In May 2015, the former mayor of New York City, Rudy Giuliani, also presented a report ordered by the national business association (*Asociación de la Empresa Privada*) on violence reduction and crime control, entitled *Estrategia Integral de Seguridad Ciudadana*.
3. Interview with a senior researcher, *Fundación Salvadoreña para El Desarrollo Económico y Social* (FUSADES), May 29, 2015.
4. Interview with an adviser, Ministry of National Defence, May 29, 2015.
5. Interview with state modernization specialist, IDB, San Salvador, June 21, 2013.
6. Interview with a ministerial adviser, Ministry of Justice and Public Security, San Salvador, July 2013, and interview with an investigative journalist, San Salvador, September 2013.
7. Interview with a state modernization specialist, IDB, San Salvador, June 21, 2013.
8. Interview with a senior researcher, FUSADES, May 29, 2015.
9. Interview with a program coordinator, USAID, San Salvador, June 3, 2015.
10. Interview with a program coordinator, USAID, San Salvador, June 3, 2015.
11. Interviews with a local researcher, San Salvador, September 1, 2013, and a local journalist, San Salvador, June 1, 2015.
12. Douglas Moreno was fired in May 2013 following an ongoing investigation for domestic violence. Shortly after, he joined the mayor's office of Ilopango. He once told the author that he had taken the job "to be on the first line of fire."
13. Interview with a religious leader, Ilopango, September 11, 2013.
14. Interview with a local research, FESPAD/Interpeace, September 11, 2013.
15. Interview with program coordinator for second-chance project, Catholic Relief Services, San Salvador, May 30, 2015.
16. Created in 1988, FESPAD is a political and research NGO that is involved in the promotion of the rule of law and the defence of human rights in El Salvador. Today, it is particularly active in violence prevention, the protection of due process and the defence of the fundamental rights of marginalized populations in and outside the judicial process, including gangs.
17. Interview with a program coordinator, FESPAD, San Salvador, September 20, 2013.
18. Interview with a program coordinator, USAID, San Salvador, June 3, 2015.
19. Interview with a senior researcher, FUSADES, May 29, 2015.

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