e-Conference Report:

The Future of Security Sector Reform

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CIGI The Centre for International Governance Innovation
Centre pour l'innovation dans la gouvernance internationale

Governance Village

Addressing International Governance Challenges

Introduction

On May 4-8 2009, the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) in partnership with Governance Village held an e-Conference on *The Future of Security Sector Reform*. The goal of the web-based conference was not to technically evaluate how different aspects of security sector reform (SSR) have been implemented and applied in the decade that has elapsed since the term was first coined, but to take stock of the evolution of the process – identifying successes, failures and challenges – and contemplate its future. Over 300 policy makers, practitioners, analysts and observers from over 50 countries and a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds took part in the conference. Participants had access to a diverse array of conference materials from papers by SSR specialists to video and audio interviews with experienced practitioners. The dialogue was rich and vibrant with an average of 47 comments posted on the e-Conference discussion board each day.

About the Author

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e-Conference Team

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The tenor of the debate during the e-Conference made clear that the SSR concept is hardly fixed or static, but rather still growing and evolving. SSR is widely recognized to be a lynchpin for state-building and peace-building processes in fragile, developing and post-conflict states. Its core principles and goals have been elaborated and widely disseminated in documents like the OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform and the United Nations Secretary-General's Report on *Securing peace and development: the role of the United Nations in supporting security sector reform*. Whilst a normative framework for SSR has been well established, albeit with some variances between countries and organizations, it has not been translated into effective SSR programming on the ground. The framework has rarely, if ever, been fully applied in practice, revealing the policy-practice divide that seems to define the record of SSR.

Although there is no shortage of commentary and analysis on the SSR experience over the past decade, it has yet to stimulate the type of innovation in SSR approaches and best practices that could make it more effective in different reform contexts. Some of the more vexing challenges facing SSR have yet to be resolved. One such dilemma, which dominated the conference proceedings, was that of local ownership. How do you promote local ownership, leadership and initiative on SSR in contexts that feature high levels of political fragmentation and low levels of human and institutional capacity? This problématique is not confined to SSR, confounding the entire development field, but solving it is nonetheless crucial for the long-term viability of the SSR model.

This report will outline and summarize the main findings of the e-Conference, breaking them down into seven topics. The dialogue did not always result in consensus, nor did it offer definitive answers to the problems and challenges identified. However, drawing on the diverse and extensive field experience of the conference participants, a better understanding of those challenges was achieved and potential strategies to overcome them probed. If the results of the con-

ference had to be reduced to one finding, it would be the need to launch a new and reinvigorated research agenda for SSR, capable of distilling the lessons learned from a decade of case studies to form a new SSR implementation framework more attuned to contemporary issues and challenges. It could be understood as second generation SSR. While the first generation of SSR involved the elaboration of the concept and its institutionalization in international practice, the second should seek to refine that model for implementation. The following topics could be considered an outline of this second generation SSR research agenda.

Local Ownership

The challenge of nurturing local ownership for SSR emerged repeatedly during the course of the e-Conference. It was recognized as key to the success of the process, but also a frequent casualty of implementation. Numerous participants stressed the importance of local ownership for the efficacy and viability of SSR. Esther Omolara Ojeah, who works in the Corrections Advisory Unit of the UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT), stressed that a "beneficiary country's security institutions and personnel should be made to work alongside intervening SSR teams so that the intervening team should not be considered alien." While many participants endorsed this view, in practice, as Ibrahim Ndzesop of the Cameroonian Foreign Ministry stated, SSR "has generally been dictated by the strong/victors" and external stakeholders, undercutting efforts to nurture broad-based local ownership and initiative.

It is important not to understate the difficulties of generating and mobilizing local ownership in post-conflict or failed states where human capacity is limited and civil society fractured. In such environments, there will inevitably be a high degree of external leadership, particularly in the early stages of the process. Even in countries where adequate capacity exists for domestic leadership, SSR processes invariably challenge existing power relations and structures, making putative local owners reluctant to support the process.

"The real conundrum", as Thomas Dempsey of the US Army War College put it, is to convince "host nation governments most in need of SSR (like Nigeria)…to accept programs that are inherently critical of [existing] governance and security delivery in the security sector."

Related to these problems of capacity deficits and scarce political will for reform is the fundamental question of "which locals?" In politically fragmented or conflicted societies, this question is all the more challenging. What level of local buy-in and engagement constitutes ownership? Is it enough to engage the local government or is it necessary to involve civil society and, as Wolf E. Poulet, an SSR consultant, suggested, the "losers and spoilers." The key, according to Nicole Ball of the Center for International Policy, is "to nurture a process that will actually allow national actors, both governmental and non-governmental, to learn to speak with each other and develop a measure of respect for each others' points of view…"

In an effort to untie this Gordian knot, Arnold Luethold of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) called for the disaggregation of the SSR concept, acknowledging that there are both "SSR activities" owned and directed by local actors and "SSR assistance" provided by external actors. The former is dependent on a high level of local ownership while the latter is intended to facilitate and stimulate local

e-Conference Statistics

Registrants for e-Conference: 306

Countries represented by participants: 50

Visits to e-Conference website: 1,375

Individual web page views: 7,705

Comments left on discussion boards: 233

Views of conference papers: 1,753

Source: Google Analytics

leadership and initiative. While this analytical approach helps to narrow the debate, it does not answer the questions relating to the who and the how. Determining who are the local owners or champions of SSR and how donors can effectively engage and empower them is central to the success of SSR and an area requiring further exploration and elaboration.
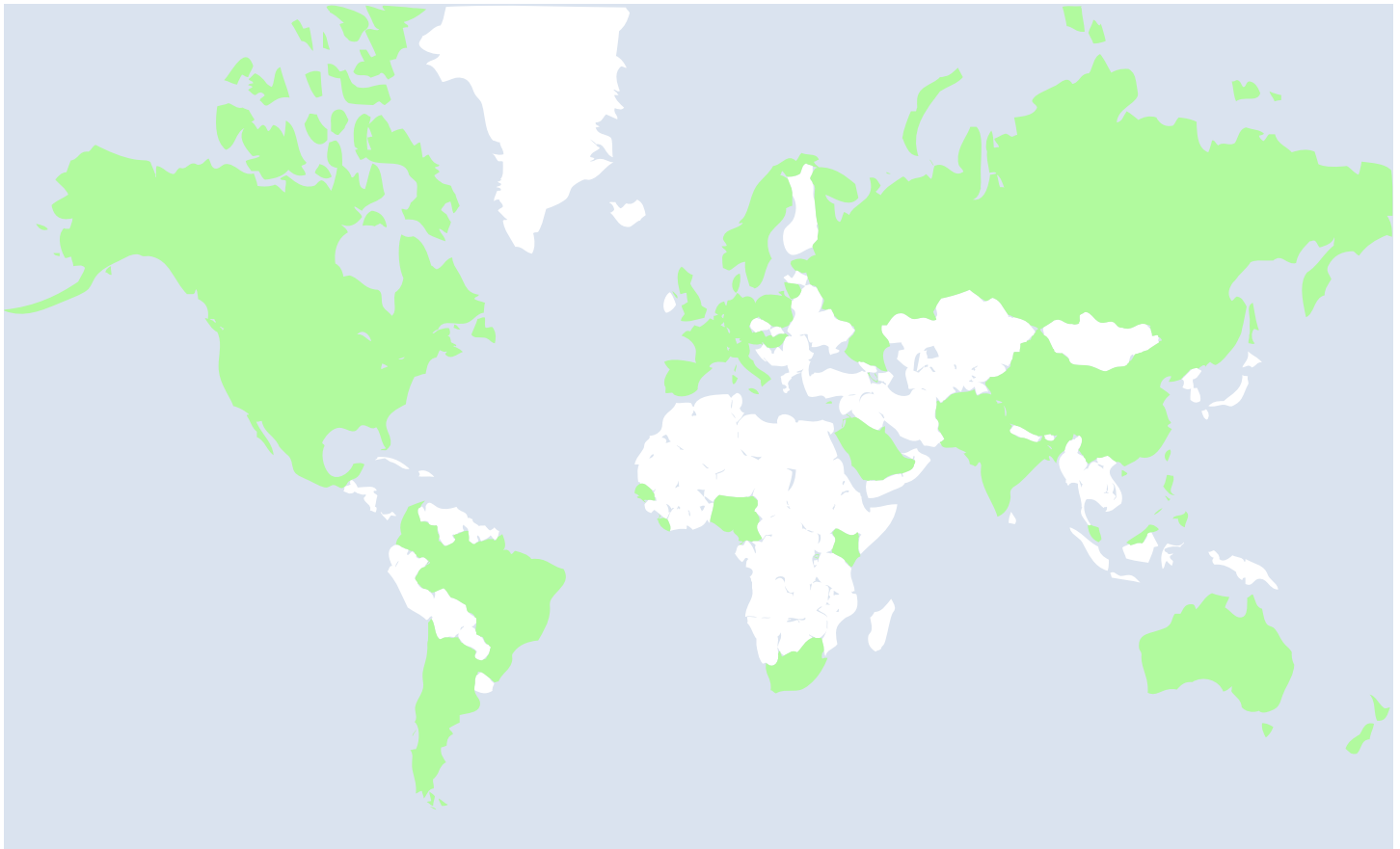
Strategy

Designing an SSR strategy for a particular implementation context requires, above all else, the recognition that SSR is a long-term process that should be measured in decades rather than one to five year programming cycles. However, it was acknowledged during the e-Conference that donor support frameworks simply do not lend themselves to such long-term thinking. The striking variance or incongruity between the de-

mands of SSR and the realities of what donors are equipped to provide places a premium on strategy. It is clear that over the long-term, bridging this gap will require changes to both the SSR model and donor assistance modalities. In the meantime, sophisticated approaches to the design and sequencing of reforms are necessary.

Peter Wilson of the Libra Advisory Group argued that it could be counter-productive to be overly prescriptive in the early stages of an SSR process. Donors should be wary of setting a strategy in a fluid and complex environment that they have not had the time to fully understand. Citing the case of Sierra Leone, Wilson advocated the advancement of an "evolutionary approach" to reform. He asserted that "the job of external actors is not to define in advance an 'end state' to be worked towards, but instead to help build capacity of security agencies to sense and respond to local de-

Geographic Distribution of e-Conference Participants

Source: Google Analytics

mands for security." Nicole Ball endorsed this notion, asserting "…that the only realistic approach is an iterative one, which implies flexibility and expectations of change as one goes along."

Clearly, rigid SSR strategies in complex and fluid environments can tie donors to arbitrary deadlines and approaches that could be based on faulty initial assumptions. But, while an "evolutionary approach" may have traction in a context like Sierra Leone where one major donor (the United Kingdom) has made a firm and long-term commitment to reform, it may be less desirable and viable in cases where there are multiple donors and interests that need to be reconciled and less enduring external funding commitments. In complex multilateral SSR cases like Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina, a coherent and flexible SSR strategy developed in the early stages of the post-conflict period could have helped rationalize what was at times disjointed donor assistance, and foster greater unity of effort. The key is flexibility and adaptability. An effective strategy must reflect local circumstances – history, politics, and culture – and be able to dynamically change over time in response to evolving conditions on the ground, raising the importance of well-developed monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

This debate makes clear that, in many respects, context is everything. Contextual conditions may demand an evolutionary or iterative approach in some cases but caution against it in others. Only by understanding a given context – through comprehensive needs assessments and threat analyses – can reformers effectively work with local actors, structures and conditions rather than around or against them.

Measuring Success

What constitutes success for an SSR program and how do you measure it? These are seemingly straightforward questions that many SSR practitioners would likely experience some difficulty in answering. The overarching goal of SSR is to create an effective, rights-respecting and democratically

accountable security sector, but this is too broad, and perhaps unrealistic, to serve as a benchmark or metric of success. There is a tendency for donors to rely heavily on statistics to assess progress, such as the number of soldiers trained or the number of courthouses (re)constructed. Measures of effectiveness have also tended to be input rather than output oriented, tracking the amount of aid funneled into a security sector rather than its impact in catalyzing desired change. This reliance on superficial numerical indicators can be misleading and deliver false positives in assessments of SSR impact. For instance, in the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan from 2003 to 2006 there was not a positive correlation between the number of local security forces trained and equipped and prevailing levels of violence. As more security forces rolled off the training ground and into the field in each country, insecurity actually increased. A closer look at the numbers revealed that the majority of the security forces trained did not meet basic readiness criteria. They received training and equipment, but still lacked the capacity to improve security conditions for their respective populations.

Peter Wilson recognized the difficulty of developing instructive monitoring and evaluation

e-Conference Survey Results*

- **84 percent** rated the discussion as "very good" or "excellent"

- **87 percent** rated the e-Conference as "very useful" or "useful" to their work

- **98 percent** rated the electronic format of the e-Conference as "user-friendly" or "very user-friendly"

- **81 percent** rated their overall e-Conference experience as "excellent" or "very good"

- **97 percent** said they would participate in another e-Conference

* Based on responses to a survey distributed to all e-Conference participants

standards: "The questions on monitoring and evaluation are notoriously difficult and apparently common-sense measures are fraught with perverse incentives. To take one simple example - does an increase in recorded crime signal an increase in insecurity (bad) or an increase in trust in the police (good)?" The tendency for many SSR programs to apply universal, off-the-shelf standards and metrics transposed from one context to the next is both futile and counter-productive.

Jeffrey Isima, the coordinator of the African Security Sector Network (ASSN), called for more nuanced qualitative measures of effectiveness in line with the vision of SSR, whose referent object is the people rather than the state:

> Measuring SSR through the lenses and from the viewpoint of the people does not only ensure a participatory (or inclusive) approach, but helps to resolve some of the paradoxes of the concept, not least the stress on international normative standards and the hushed reference (if any) to day-to-day security dilemmas of the common as opposed to that of the state.

The need for more innovative and textured measures of effectiveness, informed by good baseline data and analysis, is as important to the success of an SSR process as the definition of a realistic end-state for it. So often both prerequisites are lacking in contemporary SSR programs.

Regional Approaches

The growing recognition over the past decade of the need to apply regional approaches to areas like conflict resolution, peace-building and crisis response has seemingly failed to influence SSR policy and practice. There was wide support among e-Conference participants to examine SSR through a regional lens. Babacar Diouf, a Lieutenant Colonel in the Senegalese Military, affirmed that "…regional organizations…can play a key role in [SSR]…" and due to their more sophisticated understanding of local conditions, as compared to Western donors, should be "the first partner to get in." Echoing these comments, Hans-

Georg Ehrhart of the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg noted, "regional organizations…should play an increasing role in terms of coordinating national SSR activities and joint concept development." The African Union, like many other regional organizations, has over the past five years intensified their engagement in SSR issues. To date, such engagement has revolved more around policy development than actual implementation.

Taking a regional approach involves more than merely including regional organizations as stakeholders in the reform process, giving them a seat at the table. It also denotes the need to apply some reforms across borders. For instance, the success of reforms in some key areas like border and customs control in a given country may be dependent upon parallel reforms in neighboring and regional states. Of course, creating a regional reform framework only magnifies the complexity of an already arduous process. As Arnold Luethold of DCAF stated,

> "SSR remains largely a state-centric concept…. [because] regional and sub-regional organizations tend to invoke the principle of non-interference and its correlated concept of state-sovereignty when asked to take collective action."

Nonetheless, as advancements in communications and transportation technology make state boundaries more porous and irrelevant, the need for regional reform frameworks will become all the more imperative.

SSR and the Non-state

In many SSR cases, particularly in post-conflict environments, reformers have adopted a blank-slate mentality, assuming they can build the sector from the ground up without consideration of what existed before. Regardless of their dysfunctionality, state of disrepair, or perceived level of incompatibility with donor norms and interests, existing security and justice structures, whether formal or informal, cannot merely be ignored or circumvented by donors. In post-conflict or failed states, it is now

widely acknowledged that non-state security and justice structures tend to be viewed by a large proportion of the local population as more accessible, effective, affordable and attuned to local realities than their formal state equivalents. According to Marcela Donadio of RESDAL, the Latin American Network of Security and Defence, "the inclusion of non-state actors [in SSR] makes a linkage with a society that may fear or distrust developments driven only by governments…"

However, not all participants saw the merit of engaging with non-state actors. Babacar Diouf likened it to "a deal with the devil [that] may come back to haunt…" the recipient government and donors. Thomas Dempsey argued that such an approach could undermine "one of the stated objectives of SSR… to restore the state monopoly on the legitimate use of coercive force." He noted that such mechanisms, by virtue of their informal nature, lack "accountability… [and] enforceable, well-understood standards for the use of force." Taking a utilitarian approach, Dempsey advised:

> "when it is necessary to partner with local non-state actors as security providers, SSR planners must take care to analyze both the advantages and disadvantages of such collaboration, and should seek measures to mitigate potential negative effects on state legitimacy and functionality."

Other participants cautioned that many non-state systems violate the fundamental human rights principles and standards that are at the core of the SSR model. Qaseem Ludin of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Afghanistan explained that many "traditional systems include certain practices and behaviors that are not only in direct violation of human rights and other modern international norms, but can have serious repercussions for people."

Deborah Isser of the United States Institute of Peace, the principal advocate in the discussion for a more constructive approach to non-state justice structures, acknowledged the validity of such concerns, and reaffirmed that informal structures are no panacea and should not be ac-

cepted wholesale, particularly "if they violate international norms." However, she also argued that the donor community should seek to better understand these structures and "develop more nuanced ways" of dealing with them. She urged participants to "accept that there are positive values in traditional systems that represent an alternative paradigm and not just a poor substitute to a western formal system."

Financial Sustainability

An all too common impact of donor-supported SSR programs is the creation of fiscally unsustainable institutions and structures. Implementing reforms with little consideration of their long-term viability risks creating external dependencies, rentier security sectors rather than self-reliant institutions as prescribed by the SSR model. Illustrating the dangers of such an approach, Michael Brzoska of the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg stated:

> Donors are in danger of repeating a mistake almost universally made by colonial powers who left newly emerging states with well organized (except in the Belgian case) but very expensive military sectors. Unsurprisingly, there was a large number of military dictatorships within a short time after independence.

While the argument for sustainable reforms seems intuitive and self-explanatory, in a post-conflict society, where the needs of the security sector

The SSR Monitor

Track developments in the SSR processes of five countries with the SSR Monitor, a quarterly publication based on grass roots field-based reporting. Go to cigionline.org/ssrmonitor for more information.

Haiti - Afghanistan - Burundi - East Timor - South Sudan

are immense and internal revenue generating capacity virtually non-existent, almost all reforms could be categorized as unsustainable. In these cases there is little a donor can do in reforming or creating the basic security and justice architecture of the state but to spend in an unsustainable fashion. According to Ghazanfar Sukkurwala of CIGI, unsustainable spending in such circumstances is a necessary evil and should be thought of as "an investment, rather than a charity" that will deliver substantial long-term benefits to donors and recipients that are not always immediately apparent on a balance sheet.

The fundamental question that this issue raises is whether SSR programs should be needs or sustainability-driven. These imperatives may not be incompatible in all cases, but in many they are. A needs-driven approach may be most apt for low-income countries with major shortfalls in human and institutional resources. However, even in those circumstances, such an approach will not be viable and may do harm over the long-term if it is not buttressed by a durable and unshakeable commitment of donors to underwrite the process and meet inevitable resource gaps. This gets back to two of the core determinants of the shape and impact of an SSR program: context and commitment.

SSR and the Private Sector

The role of private sector actors in SSR has grown steadily in recent years. According to Edouard Belloncle of Saferworld, there are four types of private sector actors engaged in SSR:

1. Small consultancies focusing specifically on SSR.

2. Development consultancy firms that have moved beyond the scope of their core competencies in areas like health and education to engage more in issues of governance and SSR.

3. Large management consultancy firms that have typically been contracted to undertake large-scale projects in the development and governance fields.

4. Private security companies (PSCs) that have characteristically been involved in the implementation of security force train-and-equip programs under the rubric of SSR.

Peter Wilson, the co-director of a boutique consultancy firm focusing on SSR, emphasized the important role that private sector groups such as his can play in providing critical technical assistance and facilitation for reforms. He affirmed that the role of his company and others like it is to "orchestrate things and bring specific skills, not to provide political direction." There is a danger, however, that increased outsourcing of SSR implementation to private sector firms could result in the gradual disengagement of donors from the process, depriving it of that indispensible political direction. According to Belloncle: "The key seems to be to have in-country donor staff keeping in mind that outsourcing does not relieve them from strategically overseeing and managing the contractor (private or not), the partner country and the project direction…"

The specific involvement of PSCs in SSR aroused a lively debate during the e-Conference. Recognizing the growing market for SSR technical expertise, many PSCs are actively working to re-brand themselves as SSR assistance providers rather than just security providers. Several drawbacks of increased PSC engagement in SSR were identified, such as their predominantly military focus and concomitant lack of civilian expertise in a wide array of SSR priority areas. As Wilson stated, "they draw on a wide range of military expertise but less often back this up with development or change management expertise" which is so critical for SSR implementation. The need for rapidly deployable technical expertise for SSR will only increase in the years ahead and PSCs are uniquely positioned to address that gap; however, it is clear that there is a need for greater clarity in mandates when dealing with these actors and more robust oversight mechanisms. Belloncle affirmed that PSCs "can play a positive role provided that there are sound policies in place to frame what are today haphazard practices on the ground…"

An actor often overlooked and underrepresented in considerations of the role of the private sector in SSR is the domestic business community. After all, as Edward Rees of the Peace Dividend Trust stated, "…the domestic private sector has, in financial terms, the most to gain from peace, and lose in the event of conflict." David Law of DCAF called this "the missing link" in studies of SSR, alluding to the critical role the local business community can have "…in establishing an environment in which the performance of a country's security sector, governance regime and judicial institutions can be optimised." Engaging such civil society actors goes to the heart of promoting local ownership for reforms. However, as Ann Fitz-Gerald stated, "oversight issues involved with this activity" is one of many challenges that need to be overcome and demonstrates the need for more innovative thinking.

Conclusions

SSR is now widely accepted to be an indispensable element of state-building processes and democratic transitions, but its record of achievement contradicts the growing influence of the model. The reality is that there are few clear SSR success stories to point to. The first decade of SSR witnessed the rapid development of the SSR normative framework, but implementation did not keep pace, fostering a policy-practice gap. Narrowing that gap should be the centerpiece of the next generation of SSR.

Despite wide variances in contexts and conditions, a number of universal lessons and best practices have emerged from studies of SSR implementation over the past decade. Those best practices, many of which were highlighted during the e-Conference and this report, should form the foundation of a new SSR model more attuned to the specific implementation challenges of contemporary SSR contexts. This second generation SSR must make strides to foster greater unity of purpose and vision among its principal global stakeholders. As Rory Keane of the OECD remarked, "donor policy com-

The SSR Resource Center

In the Fall of 2009, CIGI will launch a new interactive website dedicated solely to SSR at: www.ssrresourcecenter.org

Featuring an expert database, country backgrounders, an SSR paper series and a host of other tools, the SSR Resource Centre will be an invaluable source of information and insight on SSR. For more information please contact Brandon Currie at: bcurrie@cigionline.org

munities remain to some degree locked within their respective thematic invisible cages, which makes coherence, coordination and complementarity all the more difficult to achieve." Breaking down these cages or silos is central to achieving more balanced, nuanced and holistic SSR in line with its normative framework.

Developing second generation SSR requires a new and invigorated research agenda that can draw on the SSR experience to produce new policy and programming strategies and practices. This report highlights some of the key topics that should inhabit this research agenda. If SSR is to be a practical tool for positive change over the coming decade rather than just an admirable but abstract normative framework, than these dilemmas and gaps will have to be addressed. Moreover, donors will be faced with a stark choice: change the way you do business, or find another model of security assistance.

About CIGI

The Centre for International Governance Innovation is a Canadian-based, independent, non-partisan think tank that addresses international governance challenges. Led by a group of experienced practitioners and distinguished academics, CIGI supports research, forms networks, advances policy debate, builds capacity, and generates ideas for multilateral governance improvements. Conducting an active agenda of research, events, and publications, CIGI's interdisciplinary work includes collaboration with policy, business and academic communities around the world.

CIGI's work is organized into six broad issue areas: shifting global order; environment and resources; health and social governance; international economic governance; international law, institutions and diplomacy; and global and human security. Research is spearheaded by CIGI's distinguished fellows who comprise leading economists and political scientists with rich international experience and policy expertise.

CIGI was founded in 2002 by Jim Balsillie, co-CEO of RIM (Research In Motion), and collaborates with and gratefully acknowledges support from a number of strategic partners, in particular the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario. CIGI gratefully acknowledges the contribution of the Government of Canada to its endowment Fund.

To learn more about CIGI please visit: www.cigionline.org

About Governance Village

Established in 2007, Governance Village (GV) is an online knowledge network that seeks to work in partnership with organizations and individuals working in governance and international development uniting Canadians and their international partners around a common purpose of social development and poverty reduction. Through this network, members have an opportunity to influence Canadian decision-makers; network with individuals and organizations; raise professional profiles, knowledge and experiences; access a central knowledge base; and raise the awareness of Canadian and global knowledge of governance practices. The project is jointly funded by the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

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