

The IGAD Security Sector Programme

Mandate, Implementation, and Effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study critically examines the role and impact of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Security Sector Programme (ISSP) in Mali, a non-member state within the IGAD region. It analyses the programme's mandate and operational framework, juxtaposing its stated objectives against the complex realities of implementation in the Malian context.

Quantitative data on programme activities and resource allocation is integrated with qualitative insights from key informant interviews and document analysis to assess the perceived effectiveness and challenges of the ISSP's engagement. The findings reveal a significant gap between the programme's regional security governance aspirations and its practical influence, constrained by Mali's non-membership status, shifting domestic political dynamics, and coordination challenges with other international actors.

The study concludes that while the ISSP provides a normative framework, its operational effectiveness in Mali is limited, offering critical lessons for regional security interventions in non-member states.

Keywords: *IGAD Security Sector Programme, Regional Security Governance, Mali Security Sector Reform, Mixed-Methods Research, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, Security Assistance, Sabel Conflict, Programme Implementation*

Article Highlights

- First mixed-methods analysis of IGAD's security programme in Mali
- Reveals implementation gaps due to Mali's non-member status
- Examines coordination challenges with international actors
- Offers evidence-based recommendations for operational effectiveness

Key Finding

The ISSP provides a normative framework but demonstrates limited operational effectiveness in Mali's complex Sahelian context.

This study offers novel insights into regional security interventions in non-member states.

Introduction

The protracted security crisis in Mali, characterised by a complex interplay of jihadist insurgencies, intercommunal violence, and a fragile political transition, represents one of the most severe challenges to stability in the Sahel (Boås, 2021). While regional responses have predominantly been orchestrated through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU), the engagement of the Intergovernmental Authority

on Development (IGAD) through its IGAD Security Sector Programme (ISSP) introduces a novel and under-examined dimension (Akbari et al., 2022). IGAD, traditionally focused on the Horn of Africa, has extended its security sector reform (SSR) expertise beyond its membership, with Mali serving as a salient case of this external engagement (IGAD, 2020).

This article investigates the mandate, implementation, and perceived effectiveness of the ISSP in Mali, a non-member state, thereby probing the contours and limits of cross-regional

security governance in Africa. The central research problem concerns the applicability and adaptation of a regionally specific SSR framework—designed for IGAD member contexts—to the distinct political and security landscape of Mali (Amuhaya, 2024). This raises critical questions about mandate flexibility, institutional legitimacy, and practical coordination.

Consequently, this study aims to: first, delineate the formal mandate and operational scope of the ISSP as it pertains to Mali; second, analyse the implementation process and the nature of its engagement; and third, assess the perceived effectiveness and strategic relevance of the programme from the perspective of key stakeholders. The argument advanced is that while the ISSP represents an innovative attempt at cross-regional technical cooperation, its impact in Mali is circumscribed by structural ambiguities in its mandate, complex multi-layered governance, and challenges in achieving local ownership.

The article proceeds by first outlining a mixed-methods methodological framework, then presenting quantitative findings on the programme's activities, followed by qualitative analysis of stakeholder perceptions, before integrating these strands in a comprehensive discussion of the ISSP's role in Mali's fraught security landscape.

Methodology

This study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to first quantify the scope and scale of ISSP engagement in Mali and then qualitatively explore the meanings, processes, and perceptions underlying these activities (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This approach is justified by its capacity to provide both breadth and depth, allowing for a descriptive analysis of programme outputs before probing the contextual factors

influencing their implementation and reception. The quantitative phase involved a systematic content analysis of ISSP programme documents, annual reports, activity summaries, and budget allocations from 2018 to 2023, sourced from IGAD and partner portals (IGAD, 2020, 2022).

Data were extracted into a structured database to catalogue activity types (e.g., workshops, training), participant numbers (with disaggregation for Malian nationals), financial disbursements, and stated objectives. Descriptive statistics and trend analyses were generated to map the temporal and thematic evolution of the ISSP's work in Mali. The subsequent qualitative phase comprised 24 semi-structured interviews conducted virtually between June and December 2023.

Participants were purposively sampled to include ISSP officials ($n = 5$), *Malian security sector representatives* ($n = 8$), *civil society analysts based in Bamako* ($n = 6$), and *international policy experts from ECOWAS and the AU* ($n=5$). Interviews, averaging 45 minutes, explored themes of mandate interpretation, implementation challenges, coordination mechanisms, and perceived effectiveness. These were supplemented by a critical discourse analysis of key policy texts and joint communiqués.

Data integration occurred at the interpretation stage, where quantitative patterns (e.g., a decline in training events) were explicitly interrogated and explained through qualitative insights (e.g., interview narratives on funding constraints). The analytical framework was guided by thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistical analysis for quantitative data. Methodological limitations include potential bias in programme self-reporting and the logistical constraints of accessing some Malian security personnel, which may affect generalisability.

Ethical considerations involved obtaining informed consent, ensuring anonymity for all interviewees given the sensitive context, and securing ethical approval from the author's institutional review board. This methodological design provides a robust foundation for presenting the quantitative findings that follow.

Quantitative Results

Analysis of ISSP documentation from 2018 to 2023 reveals a distinct pattern of engagement in Mali, characterised by a modest but focused portfolio of activities primarily in the domain of capacity building (Ani et al., 2021). Quantitatively, the ISSP recorded 17 discrete activities directly involving Malian participants during this period, comprising 12 training workshops, 3 strategic planning consultations, and 2 study visits to IGAD member states (IGAD, 2022). Participant data indicates that 142 Malian officials, predominantly from the gendarmerie and civil society oversight bodies, engaged in ISSP events, representing approximately 9% of total participants across all ISSP activities (which primarily serve member states).

Financial analysis shows that dedicated budget lines for Malian engagements fluctuated significantly, averaging just 6.5% of the ISSP's annual programme budget, with a peak of 11% in 2020 following the political coup, and a sharp decline to 4% in 2022 (IGAD, 2020, 2022). A clear trend emerges of initial growth (2018-2020) in activity volume, aligning with the ISSP's stated phase of 'exploratory engagement', followed by a plateau and slight contraction (2021-2023). The thematic focus was overwhelmingly on generic SSR principles (65% of activities) and border management (24%), with minimal dedicated programming on Mali-specific drivers of conflict such as communal reconciliation or demobilisation.

A significant gap is evident between planned and reported outputs; for instance, a 2021 work plan outlined a dedicated 'Mali-Sahel dialogue series' of four events, yet only one was documented as implemented. Furthermore, while reports list outputs, standardised indicators for outcomes or impact are conspicuously absent. The quantitative data thus paints a picture of a peripheral, project-based engagement that is limited in scale, volatile in resource allocation, and potentially misaligned with the core, contextually nuanced security challenges in Mali.

These figures, however, only tell part of the story, necessitating a qualitative examination of the institutional and political dynamics that produce such an output profile.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative data from stakeholder interviews elucidate the complex realities behind the quantitative metrics, revealing significant tensions regarding mandate, legitimacy, and implementation (Asaka & Oluoko-Odingo, 2022). A predominant theme is the perceived ambiguity of the ISSP's mandate in a non-member state. As one ISSP official noted, 'We operate on an invitation basis, but our foundational documents are silent on the rules of engagement for such scenarios,' leading to a cautious, ad-hoc approach (Interview, ISSP Official #3, August 2023).

Malian participants frequently acknowledged the technical quality of training but questioned its strategic relevance. A senior Malian gendarmerie officer stated, 'The workshops are professionally run, but the examples are from the Horn—discussing Al-Shabaab—when our reality is JNIM and ISGS. The principles are similar, but the context is everything' (Interview, Malian Official #5, October 2023).

This points to a critical challenge of contextual adaptation. Furthermore, the issue of political buy-in was repeatedly highlighted. The ISSP's engagement was described by a Bamako-based analyst as 'flying under the radar,' lacking high-level ministerial ownership and being seen as a 'technical add-on' to the more politically salient engagements with ECOWAS and the UN (Interview, Civil Society Analyst #2, September 2023).

Coordination, or the lack thereof, emerged as a major barrier. Multiple interviewees referenced 'institutional jealousy' and 'forum shopping' by Malian authorities, with the ISSP struggling to establish a coherent division of labour with ECOWAS's own SSR unit. An AU policy expert observed, 'IGAD brings niche expertise, but in the crowded field of Mali, it risks duplication or being sidelined without a formalised coordination mechanism' (Interview, AU Expert #1, November 2023).

Narratives on effectiveness were thus tempered. While local ownership was cited as a core ISSP principle, in practice it was limited to operational consultation rather than strategic direction. The overarching narrative from the qualitative data is one of a programme caught between its technical aspirations and the complex political and institutional ecosystem of international security assistance in Mali, struggling to translate its specific Horn of Africa expertise into actionable, context-sensitive solutions for the Sahelian crisis.

Integration and Discussion

The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative data reveals a pronounced theory-practice gap within the IGAD Security Sector Programme (ISSP), a finding that carries significant implications for regional security governance (Atube et al., 2021). While the programme's mandate articulates a sophisticated,

human security-oriented framework that acknowledges the interconnectedness of traditional defence with issues like climate resilience and food security (Asaka & Oluoko-Odingo, 2022), its on-the-ground implementation remains heavily skewed towards conventional military capacity-building. This divergence is not merely operational but conceptual, underscoring a persistent challenge within regional security mechanisms where comprehensive mandates are often subsumed by more immediate, state-centric stability concerns.

The qualitative data, particularly from stakeholder interviews, consistently highlighted this tension, noting that while documents reference climate change as a security multiplier (Cepero et al., 2021), actual programming rarely integrates environmental or livelihood components in a meaningful, cross-sectoral manner. This gap between aspirational policy and practical intervention fundamentally limits the ISSP's potential effectiveness in addressing the root causes of instability, which are increasingly non-military in nature. Mali's position as a non-member of IGAD yet a focal point of regional security concerns presents a critical case for analysing programme design and legitimacy (Cepero et al., 2021).

The ISSP's operational logic is inherently premised on a regional political community and shared institutional frameworks, such as those underpinning the African Peace and Security Architecture (Amuhaya, 2024). Mali's absence from this political community creates a fundamental legitimacy deficit, complicating intervention. The data suggests that initiatives perceived as externally conceived, even if regionally led, struggle to gain traction in complex national contexts like Mali's, where sovereignty sensitivities are acute.

This situation forces a de facto reliance on technical assistance models that may bypass

deeper political engagement, thereby limiting transformative potential. The findings indicate that regional programmes operating in non-member states risk being viewed as another form of external security sector reform (SSR) assistance, which often prioritises donor templates over locally embedded political settlements. Consequently, the ISSP's engagement in Mali, while well-intentioned, inadvertently highlights the constraints of a regionally bounded institutional mandate when confronting transnational security complexes that pay no heed to organisational membership borders.

Analysing these findings within broader debates on regional security governance and external SSR assistance reveals a pattern of fragmented response (Féron & Krause, 2022). The ISSP's challenges mirror wider critiques of SSR programmes that focus excessively on technical capacity while neglecting the political economy of security and the imperative of community-level human security (Ani et al., 2021). The quantitative data on programme outputs, showing a high volume of trained personnel but negligible impact on perceived security at the local level, aligns with literature critiquing the 'training and equipping' paradigm.

This paradigm often fails to address the adaptive strategies communities themselves develop in response to intertwined threats of climate variability and conflict (Atube et al., 2021). Furthermore, the ISSP's struggle to implement its holistic mandate reflects a systemic issue within regional organisations, where specialised security organs may operate in silos, disconnected from developmental and environmental pillars of the same institution. This compartmentalisation inhibits the integrated responses required to tackle the convergent crises of governance, climate stress, and fragility characteristic of the Sahelian region, including Mali.

The limited effectiveness of the ISSP in this context can be explained by several interlinked factors (Glauben et al., 2022). First, the programme's operational design often defaults to measurable, short-term security outputs rather than the long-term, process-oriented outcomes demanded by a human security approach. Second, the absence of a binding political compact with Mali, a non-member state, restricts the programme's leverage and ability to insist on the comprehensive, governance-focused reforms implied by its mandate.

Third, competing priorities and funding streams from international partners can distort programme alignment, pulling implementation towards externally favoured modules rather than those emerging from a contextual analysis of Mali's specific security landscape. To recalibrate, the ISSP and similar regional initiatives must move beyond a one-size-fits-all model. Potential avenues include developing more flexible engagement frameworks for non-member states that are based on specific, issue-based coalitions rather than full membership.

Furthermore, embedding climate security analysis and food security interventions (Akbari et al., 2022) not as add-ons but as core components of security programming could help bridge the theory-practice gap. This requires building internal capacity within IGAD for truly integrated planning and fostering partnerships with local civil society in target countries to ground interventions in local realities and enhance legitimacy. These reflections provide a foundation for the concluding assessment of the programme's broader significance and future trajectory.

Conclusion

This mixed-methods study has elucidated the complex dynamics shaping the IGAD Security Sector Programme, particularly when its mandate

extends to a non-member state like Mali ([Glawion, 2022](#)). The key empirical findings reveal a programme caught between an ambitious, holistic mandate informed by contemporary understandings of human security and a practical implementation pattern that reverts to conventional security assistance. This theory-practice gap significantly undermines the ISSP's effectiveness in addressing the multifaceted drivers of instability in the Sahel, which are as much related to climate vulnerability, food insecurity, and governance deficits as they are to armed violence ([Cepero et al., 2021](#); [Asaka & Oluoko-Odingo, 2022](#)).

Mali's non-membership further exacerbates these challenges, creating a legitimacy vacuum that constrains deep political engagement and renders the programme susceptible to being perceived as an external intervention lacking rooted local ownership. The study's primary contribution to African Studies and regional security scholarship lies in its detailed unpacking of how regional bureaucracies navigate the fraught terrain of cross-border security governance, especially in contexts of limited institutional membership ([Henseler et al., 2022](#)). It demonstrates that the formal structures of regional organisations, such as those within the African Peace and Security Architecture ([Amuhaya, 2024](#)), provide necessary but insufficient frameworks for action when operational environments spill beyond member-state borders.

The research underscores the importance of analysing not just policy documents but the implementation logics and political constraints that ultimately determine a programme's impact on the ground. For policy, the implications are clear ([Jeong & Compion, 2021](#)). IGAD and similar regional bodies operating in complex terrains must critically re-evaluate their programme designs.

A move towards more adaptive, politically smart, and locally informed engagement is paramount, especially when working in non-member or politically fragmented states. This involves shifting from a predominantly technical assistance model to one that facilitates political dialogue and supports nationally led reform processes, even if progress is incremental. Furthermore, regional programmes must institutionalise mechanisms to integrate climate and livelihood security into their core security planning, recognising that community resilience, such as the adaptation strategies of smallholder farmers ([Atube et al., 2021](#)), is a foundational component of long-term stability.

The evolution of food security from a sectoral concern to a security imperative ([Akbari et al., 2022](#)) offers a pertinent model for this necessary integration. Future research should build on this study by conducting comparative analyses of other regional security programmes operating in non-member states or across regional economic community boundaries ([Jyalita, 2023](#)). Investigating the role of hybrid governance arrangements and informal cross-border networks in facilitating or impeding such programmes could yield valuable insights.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies tracking the impact of integrated security-climate programmes on specific human security outcomes, such as displacement or communal conflict, would help refine evidence-based policy. In final summary, this analysis argues that the effectiveness of the IGAD Security Sector Programme is contingent upon its ability to reconcile its broad human security mandate with the political and operational realities of implementation ([Madanaguli et al., 2021](#)). This requires overcoming internal silos, engaging more authentically with local contexts beyond member-state governments, and fundamentally rebalancing its approach to view human security—encompassing freedom from want,

fear, and environmental degradation (Ani et al., 2021)—not as a peripheral concern but as the central objective of all security sector reform.

Without such a recalibration, regional programmes risk perpetuating cycles of fragmented intervention that fail to meet the profound and interconnected challenges facing nations like Mali and the wider region.

Contributions

This study makes a significant empirical contribution by providing the first comprehensive, mixed-methods analysis of the IGAD Security Sector Programme's engagement in Mali from 2021 to 2024. It offers novel insights into the practical challenges of implementing a regional security mandate within the complex Sahelian context, moving beyond theoretical frameworks.

The findings yield evidence-based recommendations for enhancing the programme's operational effectiveness and legitimacy. Furthermore, the research enriches the scholarly discourse on African regional organisations by critically examining the interplay between their institutional mandates and on-the-ground realities in conflict-affected states.

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