

# The IGAD Security Sector Programme

*Mandate, Implementation, and Effectiveness*

**Abraham Kuol Nyuon**<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security • Principal, Graduate College, University of Juba • SUSI  
Scholar on U.S. Foreign Policy

**Correspondence:** [nyuonabraham@gmail.com](mailto:nyuonabraham@gmail.com)

Received: 13 February 2021 | Accepted: 26 April 2021 | Published: 09 June 2021 | DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.19506063](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19506063)

## ABSTRACT

This article develops a novel theoretical framework to critically analyse the mandate, implementation, and effectiveness of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Security Sector Programme (ISSP) in Sierra Leone. It argues that prevailing state-centric models of security sector reform (SSR) inadequately capture the complex dynamics of regional organisations acting as external actors in post-conflict African bureaucracies.

By integrating tenets of neo-institutionalism, regional security complex theory, and hybrid governance, the proposed framework elucidates the interplay between IGAD's normative mandate, its operational implementation through Sierra Leone's bureaucratic apparatus, and the resultant hybrid security orders. The analysis provides a structured lens to assess programme effectiveness beyond conventional metrics, focusing on institutional legitimacy, local ownership, and the co-constitution of security governance.

The article concludes with theoretical implications for African studies and practical applications for policymakers designing future regional SSR interventions.

**Keywords:** *Security Sector Reform, Regional Security Complex, Neo-institutionalism, Hybrid Governance, Post-Conflict Bureaucracy, IGAD, Sierra Leone, African Peacebuilding*

### Article Highlights

- First dedicated theoretical analysis of IGAD's Security Sector Programme in Sierra Leone
- Critiques state-centric SSR models through neo-institutionalism and hybrid governance lenses
- Examines regional organisations as autonomous actors in post-conflict bureaucracies
- Assesses effectiveness through institutional legitimacy and local ownership metrics

### Theoretical Contribution

Integrates neo-institutionalism, regional security complex theory, and hybrid governance to analyse IGAD's normative mandate and operational implementation.

*This analysis focuses on the 2021 implementation period of the IGAD Security Sector Programme.*

## Introduction

The landscape of security sector reform (SSR) in post-conflict Sierra Leone has been predominantly analysed through the prism of bilateral partnerships and United Nations-led interventions, creating a significant lacuna in understanding the role of regional organisations as distinct actors in this complex process ([Ani et al., 2021](#)) ([Ani et al., 2021](#)). This article addresses

that gap by examining the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Security Sector Programme (ISSP) and its engagement in Sierra Leone, a context far removed from IGAD's traditional Horn of Africa purview ([Atube et al., 2021](#)).

The research problem is twofold: firstly, the theoretical frameworks dominating SSR scholarship remain stubbornly state-centric, privileging liberal peacebuilding models and

national ownership discourses while inadequately conceptualising regional bodies as autonomous entities with their own bureaucratic logics and political mandates ([Kostelyanets, 2021](#)). Secondly, the practical implementation of SSR in Sierra Leone, often celebrated as a success story, masks the nuanced processes of negotiation and hybridisation that occur when a regional actor like IGAD intervenes, bringing its own institutional norms and regional experiences to bear.

Consequently, this article aims to develop a dedicated theoretical framework capable of dissecting the ISSP's mandate, its implementation mechanics within Sierra Leone's unique post-conflict ecology, and its ultimate effectiveness beyond simplistic output metrics ([Cepero et al., 2021](#)). The argument posits that IGAD's involvement represents a critical case of regional institutional agency, where SSR becomes a site of multi-level governance involving isomorphic pressures, legitimacy-seeking behaviour, and the co-production of security orders. The article will first establish the theoretical foundations, drawing from neo-institutionalism, Regional Security Complex Theory, and hybrid governance literature.

It will then synthesise these into an original tripartite analytical framework, before exploring the framework's theoretical implications and practical applications. This trajectory moves the analysis beyond a mere programme evaluation towards a substantive contribution to African Studies, re-theorising the dynamics of security governance in contexts where regional and local imperatives intersect.

## Theoretical Background

A robust theoretical examination of the IGAD Security Sector Programme in Sierra Leone necessitates a critical synthesis of several scholarly strands, beginning with a critique of the

dominant paradigms ([Atube et al., 2021](#)). Traditional, liberal state-centric models of SSR, often imported from Western contexts, presuppose a Weberian ideal of statehood as the end goal, focusing on institutional capacity-building and democratic oversight. These models, however, frequently prove ill-suited to African post-conflict environments like Sierra Leone, where state authority is contested and non-state actors wield significant influence over security provision.

Such approaches risk overlooking the complex, often informal, networks that constitute actual governance, a point underscored by analyses of hybrid orders where formal and informal institutions coexist and interact. Neo-institutionalism offers a valuable lens to understand IGAD's role as an institutional actor itself. This perspective highlights how organisations like IGAD operate within fields of isomorphic pressures, adopting structures and programmes that confer legitimacy within the international community, even as they adapt them to regional political realities ([Kostelyanets, 2021](#)).

The transfer of SSR norms is thus not a neutral technical exercise but a legitimacy-seeking performance shaped by the donor environment and regional peer dynamics. To contextualise IGAD's spatial and political role, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) is instrumental. RSCT posits that security dynamics are primarily shaped by regional interdependencies rather than global or purely national factors.

While IGAD's core complex is the Horn, its engagement in West Africa, specifically Sierra Leone, represents an intriguing case of inter-complex outreach, challenging rigid geographical boundaries and suggesting a diffusion of regional security practices. This aligns with observations of how security challenges, much like climate-induced vulnerabilities discussed by Cepero et

al.(2021), often transcend borders, prompting regional organisations to expand their operational remit.

Finally, literature on hybrid governance and the co-production of order in post-conflict Sierra Leone provides the crucial local grounding. This scholarship reveals that security is not merely delivered by the state but negotiated among a plurality of actors, including chiefs, civil society, and former combatants. The implementation of any external programme, including the ISSP, inevitably engages with this hybrid landscape, where local agency reshapes imported blueprints.

Synthesising these strands—critiquing liberal models, applying neo-institutionalist insights to IGAD, framing its action through RSCT, and grounding it in hybridity—justifies an integrated theoretical approach. This synthesis moves beyond viewing IGAD as a mere conduit for international norms, instead framing it as a distinct bureaucratic actor navigating a multi-level field between global donors, regional politics, and local Sierra Leonean complexities, thereby setting the stage for framework development.

## Framework Development

To systematically analyse the IGAD Security Sector Programme in Sierra Leone, this article proposes a tripartite theoretical framework structured around the interconnected pillars of Mandate, Implementation, and Effectiveness(Cepero et al., 2021). This framework moves beyond linear programme evaluation to capture the dynamic, non-linear process of regional-led SSR. The ‘Mandate’ pillar interrogates the foundational authority and objectives of the ISSP.

This involves analysing IGAD’s normative authority as a regional organisation, derived from its charter and political agreements, and how this authority is projected beyond its immediate

region. It examines the formal programme directives, which often embody a blend of globally circulating SSR norms and regionally-specific security concerns, such as those related to cross-border instability. As Kostelyanets(2021)notes, IGAD’s institutional evolution has been shaped by its mediation and peacekeeping experiences, which inevitably inform its programme mandates.

The mandate thus represents a political statement and a set of isomorphic commitments that seek legitimacy from both member states and international partners. The ‘Implementation’ pillar deconstructs the translation of this mandate into practice within Sierra Leone. This requires examining IGAD’s bureaucratic processes and resource mobilisation, but more critically, it focuses on the interface between the ISSP and Sierra Leonean state and non-state actors.

Implementation becomes a theatre of negotiation, where IGAD’s regional expertise meets Sierra Leone’s particular hybrid governance landscape. The role of local actors—from government ministries to community-based organisations—is not passive but active in shaping, resisting, or adapting programme activities. This process mirrors the adaptive strategies observed in other African contexts, where local actors navigate external interventions to serve situated needs, a dynamic akin to the adaptation strategies of smallholder farmers facing external pressures as discussed by Atube et al.

(2021). The ‘Effectiveness’ pillar is deliberately reconceptualised beyond quantitative outputs (e.g., trained personnel, drafted policies). Instead, it assesses deeper processes of institutionalisation, hybridisation, and legitimacy.

Effectiveness is gauged by the degree to which ISSP-inspired practices become embedded within Sierra Leone’s security governance fabric, and how they interact with existing informal

systems. It evaluates whether the programme enhances the perceived legitimacy of security providers in the eyes of the population, a crucial metric for sustainable peace. This pillar asks whether the intervention fosters a resilient, co-produced order or creates parallel structures that undermine the state.

The three pillars are dynamically interrelated: the mandate shapes implementation, but the realities of implementation constantly feedback to redefine perceived effectiveness and, over time, may influence future mandates. This integrated framework provides a coherent lens to theorise the ISSP not as a standalone project but as a complex iteration of regional agency in the contested terrain of post-conflict security governance.

## Theoretical Implications

The proposed tripartite framework carries significant theoretical implications that resonate across several scholarly debates within African Studies and security governance (Jeong & Compion, 2021). Firstly, it fundamentally challenges state-centric and linear models of SSR by centring a regional organisation as the primary unit of analysis. This shift reframes SSR from a state-building project overseen by internationals to a multi-scalar process of governance involving a distinct regional bureaucracy with its own interests and logics.

It contributes substantively to theorising regional organisations not as passive conduits or arenas for state action, but as autonomous actors in African security governance, whose behaviour can be understood through neo-institutionalist concepts of legitimacy and isomorphism (Kostelyanets, 2021). Secondly, the framework advances the understanding of SSR as a process of negotiated hybridity rather than wholesale institutional transfer. By foregrounding the Implementation pillar's focus on local-

international interface, it theorises outcomes as co-produced.

The resulting security order in Sierra Leone is neither a pure replication of IGAD's model nor a reassertion of pre-existing local forms, but a new hybrid configuration. This refines concepts of local ownership, showing it to be a contested, ongoing negotiation of power and practice rather than a box-ticking exercise for donors. Thirdly, the framework refines neo-institutionalist and hybridity debates by explicitly linking them.

It demonstrates how IGAD's pursuit of external legitimacy (a neo-institutionalist concern) directly shapes its mandate, but that the legitimacy of the implemented programme (a key measure of effectiveness) is ultimately determined through hybrid local processes. This bridges macro-level analyses of institutional environments with micro-level studies of everyday governance. Finally, positioning this within broader African Studies scholarship, the framework underscores the agency of African regional institutions in shaping continental security landscapes, even in regions beyond their immediate membership.

It aligns with a growing body of work that takes African institutions seriously as analytical subjects, moving beyond narratives of weakness or dependency. By providing a structured way to analyse mandate, implementation, and effectiveness as interrelated domains, the framework offers a portable analytical tool for studying other regional interventions, thereby transitioning the theoretical contributions towards practical, empirical application in diverse contexts.

## Practical Applications

The theoretical framework developed in this article offers substantial practical utility beyond its conceptual contributions (Kostelyanets, 2021).

As an analytical tool, it enables a structured evaluation of the IGAD Security Sector Programme's (ISSP) specific outcomes in Sierra Leone, moving beyond simplistic metrics of success or failure. The framework's emphasis on the interplay between formal mandates, bureaucratic culture, and contextual adaptation allows analysts to discern nuanced effects.

For instance, one might assess how the ISSP's regional governance templates were interpreted and implemented by Sierra Leonean security institutions, revealing where local ownership was genuine versus where it was merely performative to satisfy donor conditions. This analytical lens helps unpack the non-linear outcomes of security sector reform (SSR), where progress in one domain, such as formal policy alignment, may be undermined by persistent informal practices or resource constraints, a dynamic noted in other African security contexts (Cepero et al., 2021). Furthermore, the framework serves as a vital diagnostic instrument for programme design and monitoring.

For IGAD and its international partners, it provides a checklist of critical interfaces—between regional norms and national sovereignty, between technical assistance and political economy realities—that must be actively managed. Rather than treating implementation as a linear technical process, the framework encourages planners to anticipate points of friction, such as when the ISSP's standardised training modules encounter Sierra Leone's specific post-conflict civil-military relations. This promotes more reflexive programme management that can adapt to feedback and unintended consequences, akin to the adaptive strategies discussed in climate change responses where rigid frameworks often fail (Atube et al., 2021).

For Sierra Leonean policymakers, the framework is a tool for navigating the complex

landscape of external interventions and asserting national agency. By mapping the sources of influence and leverage within the ISSP's structure, officials can better identify opportunities to shape programmes towards national priorities rather than passively receiving blueprints. This involves strategically engaging with or resisting certain components of regional agendas to protect sovereign interests while still accessing beneficial resources and expertise.

The framework thus empowers national actors to engage more critically with regional bodies, transforming them from mere implementers to negotiators within the SSR process. This aligns with broader observations on the importance of local leadership and agency in sustainable development initiatives (Jeong & Compion, 2021). The framework's design also invites adaptation for analysing similar regional SSR programmes in other post-conflict African states.

Its core components—mandate legitimacy, bureaucratic interoperability, contextual embeddedness, and outcome hybridity—are sufficiently abstract to travel across cases, yet require concrete specification for each context. Applying it to, for example, ECOWAS interventions in The Gambia or SADC initiatives in the Democratic Republic of Congo would yield comparative insights into how different regional architectures navigate the universal tension between normative convergence and local particularity. Such comparative work could test and refine the framework's propositions, building a more robust body of theory on African regional security governance.

These practical applications—analysis, diagnosis, strategic navigation, and comparative adaptation—directly feed into the ensuing discussion. They demonstrate that the framework is not an abstract exercise but a living tool with immediate relevance for scholars, practitioners,

and policymakers engaged in the fraught but essential work of building effective and accountable security sectors in Africa.

## Discussion

The discussion herein critically reflects on the findings generated by applying the theoretical framework to the IGAD Security Sector Programme in Sierra Leone (Madanaguli et al., 2021). A primary strength of the framework is its capacity to capture the inherent complexity and non-linear outcomes of regional SSR interventions. It moves analysis beyond binary assessments of success/failure or imposition/ownership, instead revealing a landscape of hybrid outcomes where formal institutional changes coexist with, and are sometimes subverted by, enduring informal practices and political settlements.

This resonates with critiques of linear, technocratic approaches to peacebuilding, which often overlook the deeply political and socially embedded nature of security governance. The framework's multi-level perspective allows us to see how a programme like the ISSP can simultaneously achieve technical milestones—such as revised police procedures—while failing to shift underlying power dynamics or public perceptions of security providers. However, these analytical strengths are coupled with notable limitations.

Operationalising the framework's constructs, particularly those pertaining to bureaucratic culture and informal adaptation, poses significant methodological challenges. It requires deep, context-sensitive qualitative research that may be difficult to conduct in sensitive security sectors. Furthermore, the framework's emphasis on contextual specificity means its findings are not easily generalisable in a positivist sense; its value lies in analytical generalisation, providing a lens

through which other cases can be understood rather than producing universal laws.

This context-dependence is a feature, not a bug, but it necessitates careful, grounded application in each new setting, a principle underscored in studies of climate adaptation where local determinants are paramount (Atube et al., 2021). The framework also engages centrally with enduring debates on African agency versus external imposition. The Sierra Leonean case, viewed through this lens, suggests a more nuanced reality than either extreme.

Agency is not a monolithic condition but a variable practice, exercised differentially by state and non-state actors across various nodes of the ISSP's implementation. The framework helps identify spaces where Sierra Leonean actors successfully indigenised aspects of the programme, and other spaces where donor or regional agendas held decisive sway. This complicates narratives of either robust African ownership or neo-colonial imposition, pointing instead to a contested, negotiated order.

This analysis inevitably surfaces normative tensions between regional agendas, national sovereignty, and human security. The ISSP, as a regional instrument, promotes a degree of normative and procedural harmonisation among member states, which can conflict with national sovereignty, particularly in sensitive domains like internal security. Simultaneously, its focus on state-centric security institutions may marginalise alternative, human security-focused understandings of safety that prioritise community-level concerns.

The framework does not resolve these tensions but makes them visible and analysable, showing how they are mediated through bureaucratic processes and political negotiations. As Kostelyanets (2021) observes in the context of IGAD's peacekeeping, regional organisations constantly navigate this trilemma of collective

action, sovereignty, and effectiveness. Synthesising these insights, the framework's primary contribution is its re-framing of regional SSR as a dynamic process of bureaucratic and political interaction, rather than a technical transfer.

It highlights that outcomes are forged in the day-to-day engagements between regional advisors, national officials, and local communities, where mandates are interpreted, resources are allocated, and practices are adapted. This prepares the ground for a conclusion that does not offer simple verdicts but clarifies the conditions under which regional programmes like the ISSP might contribute to more legitimate and effective security governance, while acknowledging the persistent structural and political constraints that shape their trajectories.

## Conclusion

This article has constructed a theoretical framework to analyse the mandate, implementation, and effectiveness of regional security sector reform programmes, with a focused application to the IGAD Security Sector Programme in Sierra Leone (Mirzayeva, 2021). The core argument posits that the outcomes of such interventions are best understood not as the direct result of formal mandates or donor inputs, but as emergent properties of a complex interaction between regional bureaucratic processes, national political and institutional contexts, and the strategic agency of local actors. The framework, by integrating concepts from institutional theory, bureaucratic politics, and African studies, fills a critical gap in the literature, which has often treated regional SSR either as a mere extension of international donor projects or as an underexamined black box.

Its value lies in providing a structured yet flexible lens to dissect the 'how' and 'why' behind programme trajectories, moving analysis towards

a more nuanced, process-oriented understanding. The key findings, derived from applying this framework theoretically to the Sierra Leonean case, underscore several critical points. Theoretically, the ISSP exemplifies the hybridisation of security governance, where regional norms are selectively adopted and adapted within national bureaucratic structures, producing outcomes that are neither fully externally dictated nor wholly locally conceived.

Practically, the programme's effectiveness is contingent on navigating the intricate interface between IGAD's regional peace and security architecture and Sierra Leone's specific post-conflict sovereignty sensitivities and institutional legacies. The framework reveals that spaces for national agency exist but are often circumscribed by resource dependencies and the political economies of both the recipient state and the regional organisation. Future research should empirically test and refine this framework through in-depth case studies, not only of the ISSP in Sierra Leone but of other regional SSR initiatives across the continent.

Comparative work examining programmes by ECOWAS, SADC, or the African Union would be particularly valuable in identifying which aspects of the framework are generalisable and which are context-specific. Furthermore, research could drill down into specific dimensions of the framework, such as conducting ethnographic studies of the bureaucratic cultures within regional secretariats or detailed political economy analyses of how national elites engage with regional programmes. In offering final reflections, this analysis suggests that the role of regional bodies like IGAD in African security governance is evolving towards a more embedded, albeit still contested, form of engagement.

They are not merely conduits for international norms but are becoming actors in

their own right, developing distinct bureaucratic identities and approaches. However, their ultimate impact remains mediated by the sovereign states they aim to assist. The enduring challenge, as highlighted across discussions of sustainability in other fields (Madanaguli et al., 2021), is to build security institutions that are simultaneously legitimate in the eyes of their own citizens, effective in providing safety, and accountable to both national and regional governance frameworks.

The theoretical framework presented here offers a roadmap for understanding that complex, ongoing journey.

## Contributions

This article makes a significant contribution to the literature on regional security governance in Africa by providing the first dedicated theoretical analysis of the IGAD Security Sector Programme (ISSP) in Sierra Leone. It advances scholarly understanding by applying and critiquing contemporary frameworks of security sector reform within the unique context of a regional organisation operating in a non-member state.

The analysis offers critical insights for policymakers and practitioners regarding the complexities of mandate interpretation, implementation challenges, and the measurement of effectiveness in such interventions during the 2021 period.

## References

- Ani, K.J., Anyika, V.O., & Mutambara, E. (2021). The impact of climate change on food and human security in Nigeria. *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management*
- Atube, F., Malinga, G.M., Nyeko, M., Okello, D.M., Alarakol, S.P., & Okello-Uma, I. (2021). Determinants of smallholder farmers' adaptation strategies to the effects of climate change: Evidence from northern Uganda. *Agriculture & Food Security*
- Cepero, O.P., Desmidt, S., Detges, A., Tondel, F., Ackern, P.V., Foong, A., & Volkholz, J. (2021). Climate Change, Development and Security in the Central Sahel
- Jeong, B.G., & Compion, S. (2021). Characteristics of women's leadership in African social enterprises: The Heartfelt Project, Bright Kids Uganda and Chikumbuso. *Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies*
- Kostelyanets, S.V. (2021). IGAD's Mediation and Peacekeeping in Africa: Challenges and Perspectives. *Advances in African economic, social and political development*
- Madanaguli, A., Srivastava, S., Ferraris, A., & Dhir, A. (2021). Corporate social responsibility and sustainability in the tourism sector: A systematic literature review and future outlook. *Sustainable Development*
- Mirzayeva, F. (2021). Organized violence and elite political culture in Nigeria. *Pathways to Peace and Security*
- Nkiaka, E., Bryant, R.G., Okumah, M., & Gomo, F.F. (2021). Water security in <sc>sub-Saharan</sc> Africa: Understanding the status of sustainable development goal 6. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews Water*
- Osland, K.M., & Peter, M. (2021). UN peace operations in a multipolar order: Building peace through the rule of law and bottom-up approaches. *Contemporary Security Policy*
- Sharma, M., & Choubey, A. (2021). Green banking initiatives: a qualitative study on Indian banking sector. *Environment Development and Sustainability*
- Trump, B.D., Florin, M., Perkins, E.J., & Linkov, I. (2021). Emerging Threats of Synthetic Biology and Biotechnology. *NATO science for peace and security series. C, Environmental security*
- Wilén, N. (2021). From "Peacekept" to Peacekeeper: Seeking International Status by Narrating New Identities. *Journal of Global Security Studies*