DEVELOPMENT FINANCING FOR SECURITY SECTOR REFORM:

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Amanda Lucey

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ACRONYMS

AfDB	African Development Bank
ADB	Asian Development Bank
CDD	Community-Driven Development
EEC	European Economic Community
EEAS	European External Action Service
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EIB	European Investment Bank
EU	European Union
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IFI	International Financial Institution
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
FCS	Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations
FCV	Fragility, Conflict and Violence
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
JSSR	Justice and Security Sector Reform
MDB	Multilateral Development Bank
OECD	Organisation for Economic Development
PDB	Public Development Bank
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
RRA	Risk and Resilience Assessment
SIDS	Small Island and Developing States
SSR	Security Sector Reform
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States

ABSTRACT

With the world facing seismic shifts, including rising nationalism, the slashing of donor budgets and shrinking civic space, the role of multilateral development banks (MDBs) has become ever more critical to achieving global ambitions such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Security sector reform (SSR) has inextricably linked to development, being a public service that promotes inclusive peace and sustainable economic growth. However, despite their public mandates, MDBs tend to include a 'non-political' clause in their articles of agreement, which has limited their financial and technical assistance to economic factors. Over time, MDBs have expanded the breadth and depth of their operations, incorporating the Sustainable Development Goal agenda. Yet their state-centric model requires a rethink if they are to be successful in driving people-centred approaches to development. This paper analyses the evolution of MDB approaches to SSR, with a specific focus on policing. It examines several MDBs, namely, the African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Investment Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank to assess the challenges to and opportunities for development financing in the future. The paper emphasises the need for stronger citizen engagement in MDB SSR policies and projects in order to enhance inclusion, sustainability and accountability.

Keywords: multilateral development banks, security sector reform, policing, people-centred development, citizen engagement, human rights

INTRODUCTION

In 2024, the number of global fatalities from conflict rose to its highest level since 1945.[1] Despite the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, little or no progress has been made on Goal 16, namely, peace, justice and strong institutions.[2] Instead, access to justice is declining and becoming more unequal.[3] Fewer resolved conflicts, increased violence by non-state actors, pandemics, and the regionalisation of conflict, exacerbated by climate change, are just some of the contributing factors. As a result, investment in security sector reform (SSR) has become more critical than ever. Security and justice are public goods, but they are expensive. The demands for international assistance in these areas are growing, but with the reprioritisation of Western donor budgets[4] the future is uncertain.

Multilateral development banks (MDBs) offer an opportunity to generate extra capital for SSR and to reshape aid frameworks. MDBs are financial institutions that are established by multiple member countries to facilitate financing and to provide advisory services for developing countries. They are often used interchangeably with the term 'Public Development Bank' (PDB), which differs from MDBs in that PDBs can be established by single governments, and international financial institutions (IFIs), which are a broader category than MDBs. There are now an estimated 536 PDBs globally which operate with USD23 trillion in assets and they make available 10 per cent of annual development finance. This illustrates that these institutions are key to financing public goods.[5]

In the past, MDBs have avoided engagement in political affairs, relying on their interpretation of 'political prohibition' in their articles of agreement, but this is changing. Development is inherently political, and Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda considers people-centred, inclusive and accountable institutions, based on human rights and the rule of law, to be development targets in their own right. Goal 16 also enables other forms of development and higher rates of economic growth.

This paper first defines SSR and police reform. It then outlines why MDBs should engage with police reform. Next, it explores the evolution of development financing for SSR by considering five different institutions: the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the European Investment Bank (EIB). These illustrate different approaches to SSR but also serve as examples of lessons learned. The paper concludes with some general observations and recommendations.

WHAT IS SECURITY SECTOR REFORM?

SSR emerged as a concept in the 1990s. With the end of the Cold War, the focus shifted from regime security to human security. This also entailed a focus on good governance, since SSR is a public service and should be subject to these standards.[6] SSR is defined as 'the political and technical process of improving state and human security by applying the principles of good governance to the security sector'. This refers to 'making security provision, oversight and management more effective and more accountable, within a framework of democratic civilian control, the rule of law and respect for human rights'.[7] SSR can focus on processes, levels of government, areas of security policy and the role of a particular institution in the security sector.

Policing is one subset of SSR. This paper focuses specifically on policing and police reform, recognising that this can involve a wide range of state and non-state actors. Policing is essential to ensuring basic safety and stability. However, the political, legal and social contexts in which police operate often change. Police reform is defined as 'aims to transform the values, culture, policies and practices of police organizations so that police can perform their duties with respect for democratic values, human rights and the rule of law'.[8] It is necessary to adapt to changing security needs and the expectations of the communities that the police serve. While there is no single model for policing, the two primary aims of police reform are, first, to improve police capacity and effectiveness and, second, to improve the integrity and accountability of police.[9]

SSR, and in turn policing, is even more critical in countries that are transitioning from an authoritarian regime to democracy or in fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCS), referring to classifications given by MDBs to describe countries with weak institutions, poor governance and vulnerability to conflict. SSR can promote unity, political neutrality, equality and professionalism.[10] A security sector that ensures security for all members of the population on an equal basis can enhance the prospects for peace.

WHY SHOULD MDBs ENGAGE WITH POLICE REFORM?

Policing is important for development. Policing can reduce crime, fostering a safer environment for business and attracting investment.[11] With reduced crime, new jobs can be created, which can in turn enhance economic growth. Policing is also important to strengthening social capital, which can facilitate economic growth. In addition, community engagement with the police enhances accountability and transparency. Policing that violates human rights – such as the inappropriate use of arrest and detention – can also have a significant impact on trust in the police; it can have negative economic consequences for the accused and their families.[12] Moreover, policing is important to promoting peaceful societies and protecting vulnerable populations.[13] Therefore, policing is a fundamental developmental issue, one with an economic rationale, and it is interlinked with other developmental areas.

The Global Peace Index (2024) estimates that the economic impact of violence on the global economy in 2023 was USD19.1 trillion in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms. This figure is equivalent to 13.5 per cent of the world's economic activity (gross world product) or USD2 380 per person. Moreover, the report notes that military and internal security expenditure accounts for more than 74 per cent of the total economic impact of violence, with the economic impact of military spending alone accounting for USD8.4 trillion in the past year.[14] With national governments moving from a focus on development aid to military expenditure, engagement by MDBs in the criminal justice sector is not only permissible, given the economic rationale, but also critical.

What, then, is the comparative advantage of MDBs over other organisations such as the United Nations (UN)? During the past few decades, MDBs have expanded their development mandates. This includes a growing focus on Fragile and Conflict Affected Situations (FCS). MDBs are well resourced, being staffed by seasoned professionals and having strong financial capacities;[15] they can multiply resources by leveraging the contributions of donors in capital markets. They can also provide technical expertise and have a strong convening power.[16] Furthermore, they have experience in working on economic and public financial management. Some MDBs, such as the World Bank, have experience in integrating security and justice into community-driven development (CDD).[17] This is a development approach that empowers communities by transferring decision-making power and resources directly to them; moreover, it can be used in SSR.

However, some challenges accompany MDB approaches. MDBs tend to use a state-centric model, relying on a country-based relationship with government bodies. This carries some risks, namely, that governments might not be reliable partners in deciding on the allocation of resources and also that civil society is treated as subordinate to government authorities.[18] While MDBs have strong convening power, coordination between government and other stakeholders may also be limited. In addition, MDBs risk minimising the context-specific conditions in which they operate, which necessitates the adoption of a more politically sensitive and human rights-based approach to avoid doing any harm.[19]

EVOLUTION OF DEVELOPMENT FINANCING FOR SSR

The nature of MDB engagement in SSR has, in the past, been controversial. Member States of MDBs have raised concerns that policies related to governance or human rights (and by default SSR) may infringe national sovereignty and politicise their lending. As a result, MDBs have advocated the doctrine of political neutrality, arguing that economic and technical decisions can be separated from politics.[20] This is seen in their founding articles of agreement, which state that the bank and its staff will not interfere in the political affairs of any Member State and that only economic considerations should be considered.

Thus, MDBs have faced criticisms that their good governance efforts remain fragmented because they are unwilling to confront the political roots of government failure. Critics have claimed that MDBs focus on ensuring the stability and predictability of the legal framework, such as private law, to secure property rights and contract enforcement but that they fail to achieve significant success. They fail to do so, it is held, because they do not deal with crucial issues such as the independence of the judiciary, criminal justice reforms or other reforms that have been considered to be too political.[21]

With the growth of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which emphasises the role of development finance to meet the funding gap, many MDBs have reframed their strategies and investments (and their measurements) along the lines of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, some MDBs continue to decouple the SDGs and human rights, viewing human rights primarily in terms of risk and compliance rather than analysing the ways in which human rights could add additional value to projects.[22] This section now analyses the evolution of MDB thinking in the areas of criminal justice and policing across five different MDBs, namely the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the European Investment Bank (EIB).

World Bank

The World Bank was the first MDB to be established in the wake of World War II in 1944. The aim was to rebuild Europe and Japan. Initially, its name was the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), but the World Bank is now made up of various entities with different focuses, from lending to low- and middle-income countries to engaging the private sector.[23] The World Bank operates globally, and its biggest shareholders are France,

Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). As the oldest MDB, it began providing financing for SSR in the early 1990s. Initially, it operated in less ambiguous areas, working primarily with justice institutions and pro-poor progammes to strengthen paralegals and civil society organisations.[24] Its thinking about its engagement in the justice and security sectors has since evolved, informed by various analytical products and concepts.[25]

In the early 2000s, the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) began using the term 'fragile states'. The World Bank continues to classify countries in this manner in order to inform strategic and operational decision-making.[26] At first, the core drivers of fragility were seen as being too political and therefore beyond the development realm.[27]

However, the World Bank's 2011 *World Development Report* justified engagement in SSR, highlighting the links between security and development and the importance of World Bank engagement in issues of conflict and fragility.[28] The report notes that this goes beyond the World Bank's traditional mandate but reflects

> *a growing international policy consensus that addressing violent conflict and promoting economic development both require a deeper understanding of the close relationship between politics, security, and development. In studying this area, the World Bank does not aspire to go beyond its core mandate as set out in its articles of agreement, but rather to improve the effectiveness of development interventions in places threatened or affected by large-scale violence.*[29]

As a result of growing requests from Member States for its support in the realm of improved governance, the World Bank issued a *Legal Note on World Bank Support for Criminal Justice Activities* in 2012.[30] The legal note concluded that there was no impediment to supporting criminal justice institutions as long as they were grounded in an appropriate and objective economic rationale and structured to avoid interference in the political affairs of a member country.[31]

Whereas criminal justice was traditionally viewed in the realm of democratisation and political reform, the World Bank's *Legal Note* views the security sector as a public service placed well within other areas of governance. However, it cautions against activities such as the financing of weapons, political crimes against the state, support for military or police in countries with pervasive human rights violations, and for those institutions or programmes that did not conform to international due process standards. The *Legal Note* states that the financing of policing, prosecutors and prisons seems likely to fall within a grey area, but certain activities (i.e. support for the development of civilian oversight functions for police) should pose fewer problems. To minimise the risk of political interference, the *Legal Note* stresses a country ownership model and the avoidance of specific case enforcement; instead, it focuses more widely on providing institutional capacity-building and technical assistance. It also emphasises the importance of conducting risk assessments of political interference before undertaking interventions.

This *Legal Note* was then followed up by a *Staff Guidance Note* in 2012, which expands on the type of interventions to be undertaken.[32] It cautions that in FCS there is an increased risk that police forces may have emerged from vigilante or paramilitary groups, which would then require more in-depth knowledge and understanding of how to engage with them. Regarding policing, the *Staff Guidance Note* considers the potential risks and mitigating strategies for civilian police reform. It also highlights the importance of safeguards to support human rights and principles of 'Do no harm' while emphasising the need for good coordination among security actors.[33]

The *Staff Guidance Note* observes that the World Bank's comparative advantage could include convening different actors for comprehensive approaches, working in areas related to economic and environmental crimes, and promoting institutional development. It states further that the World Bank has a comparative advantage in several areas relevant to engagement in the criminal justice sector: court reform, public financial management, public sector management, work with supreme audit institutions, anticorruption strategies and commissions, and asset recovery. It states that, in areas of policing, where the World Bank does not have a clear advantage but where there is still a substantial demand for support, the Bank could seek to strengthen existing and/or build new partnerships, for example, by expanding current work with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Eupol, INTERPOL, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and others. It defines core areas of World Bank expertise as governance assessments, capacity-building action plans, resource management action plans, public accountability systems and service delivery enhancements.

Despite these advancements, human rights advocates have continued to insist on a stronger human rights perspective across World Bank policies and projects. In 2016, the World Bank came under fire from Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, who claimed that the World Bank was a 'human-rights free zone'.[34] According to Alston, the primary underlying reason for this claim was the 'anachronistic and inconsistent' interpretation of political prohibition in the articles of agreement. Alston accused the World Bank of paying lip service to human rights and adopting an approach that was based on double standards. In this regard, Alston notes that General Counsels have found ways to work on matters as diverse as corruption, money laundering, terrorist financing, governance and the rule of law while, at the same time, human rights remain on a very short blacklist.[35] Conversely, proponents of the World Bank's approach have responded by arguing that human rights law is ambiguous, contested and politically charged, and particularly problematic for multilateral organisations, since only some Member States have ratified specific human rights treaties. In this regard, enforcing human rights law would be costly and it would divert funds away from development.[36]

Rather than incorporating human rights as an integral part of its approach, the World Bank has instead focused on reducing the risks related to human rights. In 2021, it developed its Strategy for FCS[37] and updated its Bank Policy on Development Cooperation and Fragility, Conflict and Violence.[38] These documents have increased its use of Risk and Resilience Assessments (RRAs), which have facilitated more conflict-sensitive programming that includes aspects such as good governance, marginalisation and equality.[39] However, civil society continues to call for a more pronounced focus on human rights. During the World Bank's recent evolution process in 2023, more than 70 civil society organisations called on it to adopt a human rights policy.[40]

Over the years, the World Bank has engaged in a wide variety of activities for SSR, including public expenditure disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration; police reform, prisons and rehabilitation; municipal and local violence prevention; transport safety; anti-money laundering; and anti-trafficking measures.[41] However, lending commitments have remained small at a total of USD2–3 billion between 1990 and 2020.[42] Most of the World Bank's investments have focused on crime prevention in the form of urban and social development programmes, with less support being given to the improvement of police operations to reduce crime.[43]

Its most effective programming has been on projects with a people-centred focus rather than only on institutional hardware.[44] Its initial efforts to avoid political interference illustrate the challenges associated with this approach. In Kenya, for instance, a World Bank review of police

reforms in 2009 pointed to the need for a strong political economy analysis in police reform, because vested interests shape the role of the police. It also considered the effects of a culture of impunity on insecurity at the grassroots level. The report found that four areas critical to police efficiency and accountability had been neglected in previous World Bank programming.[45] These were: sensitivity to the systems within which police goals and operations are determined and executed; the recognition, regulation and coordination of public and private policing services; gender issues in the police force; and data collection, research and planning. The review points to the need for organisational restructuring and transformation, structural reforms and capacity-building efforts.

There is now growing recognition that a public-sector and people-centred approach is a justifiable way for the World Bank to engage in SSR, given its mandate 'To end poverty on a Liveable Planet'. This involves analysing the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, transparency and accountability, and people's enjoyment of services.[46] The World Bank has also recognised the importance of a holistic approach to policing that combines community and problem-oriented policing (a strategy to identify the underlying causes of crime) with restorative justice processes, particularly in communities that have been historically marginalised.[47]

Inter-American Development Bank

In comparison to the World Bank, the IDB claims to be the first development bank that responded to problems related to violence.[48] Its broad mission focuses on improving lives for people in Latin America and the Caribbean. The IDB's primary shareholders are Argentina, Brazil, Japan, Mexico and the US. In the mid-1990s, only Africa registered higher homicide rates than Latin America and the Caribbean. Many of these countries were, at the time, also undergoing a transition to democracy. Therefore, in 1996, the IDB's President, Enrique V Iglesias, gathered the region's citizens' views on the need to reduce violence. The IDB justified its interventions related to violence based on research that documented the economic costs of different types of violence, therefore fulfilling the economic justification required by the charter.[49] The IDB began to fund violence prevention and also began to quantify the economic costs and the way this aligned with economic and social multipliers. By focusing on the preventive aspect, the IDB could avoid contradicting the basic principles of interference in political affairs.[50] The IDB then began to include the idea of citizen security in the development agenda.

In 2012, the IDB developed a discussion paper entitled *Citizen Security: Conceptual Framework and Empirical Evidence*.[51] It has also developed *Operational Guidelines for Program Design and Execution in the Area of Civic Coexistence and Public Safety*. Its areas of support include social interventions; situational prevention; support to the police, the judiciary and the penitentiary system; and institutional capacity-building. It specifically excludes certain areas of action, including military operations, anti-terrorism intelligence and armed conflict operations, to avoid political interference. The framework outlined the need for integrated, comprehensive public sector responses to crime and justice, noting that past interventions had been too narrowly focused. The concept of citizen security, instead of strengthening the coercive functions of the state, should 'emphasize strengthening democratic governance and focusing on the individual within a democratic context'.[52] In 2014, it published a response to the key challenges in *Citizen Security from 1998–2012*[53] and then developed the *Citizen Security and Justice Framework*.[54]

In 2018, an IDB discussion paper stated that it is necessary to link the areas of citizen security and criminal justice in order to develop comprehensive responses to programmes while still

maintaining that it does not finance any activities that can be interpreted as political interference.[55] It notes that Member State requests for IDB support have grown significantly. Specifically, it states that in the past two decades the IDB financed 30 projects, which include interventions in the different links of the citizen security and justice chain, both nationally and locally, totalling USD1.15 billion in 23 countries. Between 2013 and 2016, ten loan operations were approved that amounted to a total of USD322 million.[56] The paper identifies the ultimate goal of citizen security as the protection of the rights and fundamental freedoms of all citizens. It notes the need for strong institutional management, requiring the IDB to (i) generate political will; (ii) generate processes with continuity, with clearly defined objectives and goals; and (iii) build good governance which enables the orderly and coordinated participation of relevant actors. The IDB has set about analysing evidence of what works in crime prevention to inform its policies,[57] and updated its *Framework* in 2017, with the latest *Framework* being updated in 2023.[58]

The IDB has specifically focused on preventive policing.[59] Despite the high demand for interventions, the IDB has financed only activities with civil and not military police. It has also financed activities such as professional police training and community policing.[60] However, because of political sensitivity, the IDB has not financed more comprehensive police restructuring and reform projects, including salary and incentive structures, decision-making processes, and internal and external accountability, which it acknowledges 'may be key to improving police performance and reducing violence'.[61] Some of the lessons learned from the IDB's engagement include the need for political commitment at the national and local levels and the need for increased community engagement in crime prevention.[62]

The *2023 Citizen Security and Justice Framework* responds to a key challenge that the IDB has identified in Latin America and the Caribbean, namely, that policing institutions do not respond effectively to crime and fail to establish ties of cooperation and trust with citizens.[63] It makes suggestions for improving management (staff recruitment and training and optimising police presence), adopting new technologies, strengthening community ties, enhancing transparency and integrity, and applying targeted strategies to complex crimes – all based on existing evidence. The IDB has evaluated various approaches to promoting cooperation between the police and citizens, including procedural justice, community policing and problem-oriented policing.

In developing the concept of citizen security, the IDB has demonstrated that it is possible to take a human rights and good governance approach to development. Moreover, in 2024, it released its *Framework to Support Populations in Situations of Fragility, Conflict and Criminal Violence (2024–2027)*. This *Framework* emphasises the destabilising effects of criminal violence and the feedback loops with institutional fragility.

African Development Bank

The AfDB, unlike the World Bank and the IDB, does not have the explicit mandate to engage in security-related processes.[64] Its strategy outlines the vision of an Africa that is prosperous, inclusive, resilient and integrated, one comprising five operational priorities: Light Up and Power Africa, Feed Africa, Industrialise Africa, Integrate Africa and Improve the Quality of Life for the People of Africa. Its primary shareholders are Algeria, Egypt, Japan, Nigeria and the US.

In the 1990s, experts began debating whether the AfDB should engage in issues of good governance. Given that its Member States are made up of African countries, the question was whether they would be able to discuss issues of governance in a less suspicious atmosphere than extra-regional organisations or whether this made them too close to the problem and unwilling to get involved.[65] In 1994, the AfDB's advisory council submitted a report arguing that the AfDB should be involved in democratisation processes and good governance.[66]

It then released a *Group Policy on Good Governance* in 1999.[67]

The AfDB established a Fragile States Unit in 2008 in recognition of the fact that development is interlinked with peace and noting the existence of a large number of fragile states in Africa.[68] In 2013, the AfDB's Fragile States Unit, observing the link between justice, security and development, cited 'the need to increase the capacity at the Bank, create better knowledge, and augment the understanding of the concept and evolution of justice and security sector reform (JSSR) – including actors, concepts, and principles – in conflict-affected and fragile states'.[69] Its *Strategy for Addressing Fragility and Building Resilience in Africa (2022–2026)* acknowledges that fragility can arise in several dimensions, including security and justice. However, it notes: 'Other partners should lead in areas that are beyond the Bank's mandate, such as humanitarian actions and direct support for peace processes, elections, and the security sector.'[70] Nevertheless, it agrees to build resilience by mitigating the drivers of insecurity and to build its capacity to engage with communities to ensure conflict sensitivity.

However, the AfDB also conducted a diagnostic assessment of 'Security, Investment and Development in 2022'.[71] The assessment found that security is a public good that cannot be disentangled from sustainable economic development and that it should be factored in to investments and development interventions. It also found that weak governance is a key driver of insecurity and conflict. At present, most financing for peace and security in Africa is done through national budgets, and the report suggests that the AfDB can do more to mobilise scalable, adaptable and flexible resources, such as through Security Indexed Investment Bonds (SIIBs). These are said to be a means of reducing the risk premiums associated with investment in fragile contexts and to promote investments that build resilience and tackle the structural causes of conflict and insecurity. However, the report does not specify which types of initiative should be financed. The AfDB could therefore do more to reconsider its approach to engaging in SSR and policing. Nonetheless, in February 2025, the AfDB signed a letter of intent to partner with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), focusing on financial crime and anti-corruption.[72]

Asian Development Bank

The ADB has the mandate to fight poverty and to improve lives and livelihoods. Its primary shareholders are Australia, China, Japan, India and the US. Over time, the ADB has shifted from a legalistic rule of law to empowerment or rights approaches. It claims to have been the first MDB to adopt a policy on governance in 1995, followed by a policy on poverty reduction in 1999,[73] and statements on law and policy reform.[74] In 1995, the General Counsel advised:[75]

> *The Bank's approach to governance issues will be guided by the provisions of its Charter. These explicitly exclude political activities and considerations. Hence, the Bank cannot act as an agency for political reform in Developing Member Countries (DMCs). Nevertheless, if on purely economic grounds, the Bank has considered an action or measure worth supporting, it has not hesitated to do so even though the action or measure may have had political implications. The Bank's work on governance will follow this pragmatic approach.*

The poverty-reduction strategy emphasises further a rights-based approach, noting that 'Beyond income and basic services, individuals and societies are also poor – and tend to remain so – if they are not empowered to participate in making the decisions that shape their lives'. The ADB's General Counsel has also remarked that human lives are both the ends and the means to economic development.[76] Securing citizens and their assets in their daily environment would therefore seem critical to any measure of economic development.

The ADB began its support of legal reform in the 1990s and gradually expanded its approach.

It also engaged in financing police reform in the 2000s in South Asian countries, including Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan[77] and the Philippines.[78] In 2005, the ADB held a symposium on access to justice challenges, including police reform. The participants emphasised community policing, with external oversight mechanisms and civilian oversight bodies, but advocated that civilian engagement should be limited to the policy level and the prioritisation of programmes. The symposium also emphasised the importance of protecting vulnerable groups. Specifically regarding donor involvement, the participants highlighted the lack of donor coordination with local government, competition among donors and self-interested donor agendas. There was also a need for comprehensive evaluation.[79]

Some of the key focus areas for policing listed in an ADB report include streamlining the organisational structure, increasing the recruitment of women, improving policing standards and discipline, improving police education and training, improving transparency and accountability, improving police behaviour, enhancing the public perception of the police, community policing, and eliminating discrimination against religious, ethnic and other minorities.[80] Gender has been a key component of the ADB's approach to policing, and in 2006 it developed a guide, *Gender, Law, and Policy in ADB Operations: A Tool Kit*.[81]

The ADB has also evaluated its work in justice reform.[82] It found that, despite its focus on good governance, its assistance in this area remained limited. It attributed this to a crowding out by other priorities in its strategic agenda, a lack of clearly defined organisational responsibilities for justice reform operations, a lack of critical mass of dedicated specialised skills needed to scale up justice reform, and the reluctance of DMCs to borrow for justice reforms.[83]

The ADB has since aligned its work to that of the SDGs, but its work in relation to Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) is minor and clustered under the thematic area of 'prosperity'.[84] Its 2030 Strategy lists operational Priority 6 as strengthening governance and institutional capacity, but places security primarily in the hands of the state.[85] It does, however, work on policing related to gender equality, such as that on domestic violence: for instance, funding GBV training and facilities in Nepal to respond to these issues.[86] In 2021, the ADB developed an approach to working in FCS and SIDS – the first time an MDB has combined these two focus areas into one strategy.[87] The strategy mentions governance and building institutional capacity in FCS and SIDS, but it does not mention criminal justice, policing or security sector reform.[88]

European Investment Bank

The EIB was created by Articles 129 and 130 of the treaty which established the European Economic Community (EEC), and which was initially signed by six countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) on 27 March 1957. Since the development of the European Union (EU), its membership has grown. Its biggest shareholders are now Germany, France, Italy and Spain; Belgium and the Netherlands are the fifth biggest shareholders, with an equal share each.

Unlike any of the other MDBs surveyed here, the EIB does not have a clause that prohibits political interference in lending decisions. Its statute draws on the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union; and since its funds are to be used 'as rationally as possible in the interests of the Union' and 'where the execution of the investment contributes to an increase in economic productivity in general and promotes the attainment of the internal market', its decisions are necessarily political.[89] The EIB states:[90]

> *The bank's task is to support the implementation of European Union policies via the financial instruments at its disposal. If this division of tasks between a political and an*

implementing sphere may seem clear in principle, one cannot ignore the fact that it is very difficult to identify in practice where policy definition ends and where implementation begins. Moreover, daily practice teaches us that separating these two dimensions completely is not only inefficient but might also be dangerous. If implementation constraints are ignored when policies are being drawn up, then there is a risk of making it impossible to achieve the desired political objectives. It is therefore unavoidable that the EIB should seem a dual entity, combining in variable proportions its roles as European institution and financial intermediary.

The EIB previously had dual-use lending criteria that restricted the Bank's investment in defence-related projects to those with civilian applications that exceed their military use. However, this was scrapped in May 2024, enabling it to invest in military products as long as they bring no lethal risk and retain some degree of civilian application. In addition, projects and infrastructure used by the military or police that also serve civilian needs have been added to the Bank's list of eligible target investments.[91] The EIB will increase investment in defence projects to €2 billion in 2025, doubling its expenditure in 2024.[92] Given the war in Ukraine, the potential for future attacks by Russia and Trump's ending of financing to the EU, some Member States have asked for additional changes in the exclusion list of the EIB, namely, that weapons and ammunition be allowed. However, the EIB has refused, observing that this could set a precedent for commercial banks.[93] More than 30 civil-society organisations have urged the EIB to prioritise projects that benefit the environment and society over military spending.[94]

The EIB has eight priorities earmarked for the period 2024–2027, namely: climate action and environmental sustainability; digitalisation and technological innovation; security and defence; a modern cohesion policy; agriculture and bioeconomy; social infrastructure; high-impact global investment; and capital markets union. Regarding security and defence, it finances European businesses and innovators of projects that protect citizens, including reconnaissance and surveillance, spectrum protection and control, cybersecurity solutions, infrastructure and military mobility.[95]

European countries have some of most effective police forces in the world,[96] but the EIB has financed police reform in some of the poorer and less-developed countries in Eastern Europe. In the Republic of Moldova, the EIB has pilot projects on community policing. They have also equipped all police inspectorates with a secure voice and data communication network to facilitate intelligence-led policing; and they have established anti-corruption and anti-money laundering units in the police force to promote the principles of zero tolerance to corruption in the force.[97] The European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission, joined by representatives of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the EIB and Frontex, also visited Armenia to discuss areas of collaboration, including justice and police reform.[98]

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conflict is on the rise and the world is far from achieving the SDGs, and Goal 16 in particular. In 2024, the Global Peace Index found that 97 countries had decreased in peacefulness over the year surveyed.[99] Europe is the most peaceful region in the world. The Middle East and North Africa is the least peaceful region, followed by sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and then Central America and the Caribbean.[100]

Financing for SSR is important, particularly in those countries and regions most affected by conflict. However, governments are choosing to prioritise military spending, which reached a global all-time high of USD2.4 trillion in 2023.[101] At the multilateral level, some MDBs do finance SSR and police reform, and there is now international consensus that peace, security and development are interlinked, which enables MDBs to circumvent their political non-interference clauses.

This report illustrates that financing for SSR and police reform has been controversial and that MDBs have adopted a variety of approaches. Most MDBs have preferred to engage in less risky activities, but the failure to engage at a more political level (such as in more comprehensive police restructuring and reform projects, as the experience of the IDB shows) has meant that projects have had limited impact. MDBs have also tended to approach human rights from a risk perspective rather than considering their added value to MDB projects and operations.

Each MDB surveyed reflects the historical trajectory of their thinking. The World Bank, favouring less contentious activities, has made relatively small investments in policing, although evaluations of its work have revealed its thinking about community- and problem-oriented policing, with a focus on restorative justice. However, the World Bank faces pressure to adopt a stronger human rights-based approach more broadly. The IDB has placed a large focus on reducing violence, given the challenges that are faced in Latin America and the Caribbean, emphasising the concepts of prevention and citizen security. It considers the ultimate goal of citizen security as being the protection of the rights and fundamental freedoms of all citizens and it therefore has provided extensive funding for this area.

The AfDB has not worked on policing, despite the need in Africa, although it acknowledges the links between justice, security and development. It has a specific Fragile States unit and a policy on good governance, but has preferred to allow other partners to lead the way on SSR. It is nevertheless now exploring the notion of security bonds and would do well to reflect more on its own approach to SSR, given the evolution of thinking among other MDBs.

The ADB has increasingly adopted a rights-based approach. However, despite its initial investments in SSR, the ADB no longer prioritises this, preferring to focus on other goals of the SDG agenda. The EIB does not have a political non-interference clause owing to its being part of the EU; and, unlike any of the other MDBs, it actively finances military spending. However, civil society has urged the EIB rather to prioritise projects that benefit people and the planet. Europe tends to have stronger policing than other parts of the world (meaning that this is less of a priority), but the EIB has financed police reform in some of the less-developed countries in Eastern Europe.

As can be seen from the above, MDBs therefore have fragmented and conflicting agendas. In addition, one of the overarching challenges is that MDBs rely on a state-centric model, working with governments (rather than civil society) to determine priorities. However, some MDBs are now moving towards adopting people-centred approaches that consider security as a public good, aligning this to the SDGs. In this regard, the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, transparency and accountability, and people's enjoyment of services are key. Beyond this, citizen engagement is critical to ensure that services are seen as being inclusive and equitable.

At the same time, civic space around the world is shrinking. Civicus estimates that some 72.4 per cent of the global population lives under repressive or closed civic space conditions. Almost 30 per cent lives in countries where civic space is completely closed.[102] Therefore, it is important that MDBs respond to this context by providing greater support to civil-society engagement in development financing. The World Bank has now launched the Civil Society and Social Innovation Alliance, a multi-donor trust fund to support CSOs and social economy actors directly. This alliance aims to institutionalise participatory approaches and to integrate innovation more effectively into the World Bank's approaches. CIVIC will focus on climate, health, gender and youths.[103] However, SSR, and policing in particular, remain sensitive issues and MDBs have yet to clarify their own notions of a people-centred approach to these areas.

A 2025 report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is instructive in this regard, explaining the situation as follows:[104]

> *Unlike conventional State-centric approaches to rule of law, justice and security promotion that prioritize the needs of the State and its institutions, this approach ensures that people's rights, needs, perspectives, and experiences drive the transformation of justice and security systems and their institutions to better serve people, especially the most vulnerable, marginalized, and those at risk of being left behind.*

It emphasises the need for a blend of institutional support (top-down) and community-based (bottom-up) interventions. UNDP's approach is built on five interlinked and mutually reinforcing elements that are grounded in the core principles of human rights, inclusion and participation, empowerment, local ownership, and accountability, namely: to support social transformation; enable systems change, deliver through holistic and integrated programming; empower people and communities; and engage the state and its institutions. This thinking can be used to guide other development partners, including MDBs.

Civil society has long been calling for MDBs to engage more deeply with citizens and to uphold human rights.[105] One platform on which civil society has been calling for stronger engagement has been through the annual Financing in Common Summit, which brings together more than 500 PDBs to determine global priorities. Currently, MDBs engage civil society in developing specific policies (such as those on environmental and social safeguards). Civil society is engaged to a lesser extent in the development of country strategies, and sometimes civil-society organisations are used as contractors to implement projects.[106] However, civil society could be more proactively engaged in determining the development financing priorities set by MDBs instead of simply engaging reactively. In some cases, civil

society advocates jointly with specific shareholders from MDBs that may be sympathetic to their cause. With the US as the biggest shareholder of the MDBs surveyed here (except the EIB), it will be critical to see whether the US continues to invest in these initiatives while approaching other amenable shareholders. Changes in the global system also provide an opportunity to reshape aid frameworks.

Given that MDBs are aligning their approaches to those of the SDGs, they would do well to consider their own frameworks in relation to Goal 16 and how this can best be facilitated. For example, MDBs have strong convening power and can do more to bring in stronger civil society perspectives in the development of their overarching strategies or specific country plans to better direct priorities, or in developing and implementing projects. Specifically on policing, MDBs can reconsider their state-centric models, financing bottom-up interventions such as community-driven development instead. They can also consider enabling a greater role for civil society in implementing social accountability mechanisms more broadly.

Goal 16 is interlinked with all other aspects of development and consequently, by avoiding the political sensitivities of financing for SSR, opportunities to secure critical resources from MDBs are missed. Accordingly, MDBs can and should do more to coordinate donor funding on these important issues and, in doing so, they should reflect on their own stances and comparative advantages.

Accordingly, the following recommendations are made.

Recommendations to MDBs

- Reconsider frameworks and strategies that will ensure a people-centred approach to development, in alignment with the SDGs.
- Refine approaches to SSR and policing as a public good, focusing on vulnerable populations, citizen engagement, and transparency and accountability.
- Share experiences on engaging with SSR and policing with other MDBs on lessons learned for greater effectiveness.
- Invest in a greater political economy analysis before financing SSR or policing projects, consulting more broadly with civil society.
- Promote human rights-based approaches to security and development.
- Use the convening power of MDBs to facilitate the development of comprehensive strategies for SSR and policing.

Recommendations to civil society

- Highlight the challenges of achieving SDG 16 and the need for more concerted financing on SSR and policing, including from MDBs.
- Engage MDB shareholders to outline the links between peace and development, raising awareness of the need for people-centred approaches to SSR, what this entails, and providing evidence of what works.
- Work with coalitions to advocate stronger citizen engagement and human rights-based approaches to SSR and policing.
- Highlight the shrinking of civic space and use this to illustrate the need for MDBs to move from state-centric to more comprehensive approaches.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Multilateral development banks (MDBs) can play a critical role in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Security sector reform (SSR) is a key part of this agenda, but MDBs have traditionally limited their assistance in this area due to non-political clauses in their articles of agreement. However, the role of MDBs has expanded over time, and there is now an opportunity to develop more people and citizen-centred engagement in SSR through MDB financing. The paper analyses the African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Investment Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank to trace the evolution of their support for SSR and to provide recommendations for the future.

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Amanda Lucey is an independent consultant with nearly twenty years' experience of working in the public policy field. She has consulted widely for various United Nations (UN) entities and has worked as a senior researcher at the Institute for Security Studies and a senior project leader at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation. Amanda also worked for the UN in South Sudan as a Rule of Law officer, and a Political Affairs officer in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She holds a Master's degree from the University of Cape Town in 'Justice and Transformation'.

ABOUT APCOF

The African Policing Civilian Oversight Forum (APCOF) is a Not-for-Profit Trust working on issues of police accountability and governance in Africa. APCOF promotes the values which the establishment of civilian oversight seeks to achieve; namely to assist in restoring public confidence, developing a culture of human rights, promoting integrity and transparency within the police, and nurturing good working relationships between the police and the community. While APCOF is active in the field of policing, its work is located in the broader paradigm of promoting democratic governance and the rule of law.

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