

**National Security Strategy
Development in Africa:**
**Highlights of the Toolkit for
Drafting and Consultation**



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Why develop an NSS?

While long envisaged, Senegal had never articulated a National Security Strategy into a formal, written document. In 2020, the twin crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing threat of violent extremist insecurity in the region led President Maky Sall to call for such a cohesive plan.

This scenario illustrates just one way by which a National Security Strategy can emerge and raises basic questions of ‘What next?’. Drawing on experience and best practices from across Africa, the national Security Strategy Toolkit provides guidelines for the process of developing a national security strategy: a vision for a stable, secure society based on its security threats and opportunities—and a plan for aligning a country’s resources and capacities to achieve this end.

Reasons to Develop an NSS

- To enhance national security – including citizens’ right to security
- To increase the population’s confidence in the government through dialogue and meaningful participation of all stakeholders
- To provide strategic national guidance to the establishment of effective, human rights compliant, and accountable security institutions
- To ensure that security resource management is driven by inclusive national priorities and is cost-effective, sustainable, and part of transparent national budgeting processes
- To enhance security sector assistance and partnership effectiveness by ensuring that external partners and donors have a national strategy toward which they can align their efforts
- To create an environment conducive to investment that will enhance foreign confidence and partnerships
- To enhance regional confidence and security cooperation
- To ensure sustainable growth through environmentally friendly utilization of natural resources for job creation and economic development.

Where to start?

One of the core functions of any government is to provide for the security of its citizens. Yet, citizens face a wide range of security conditions. An inclusive National Security Strategy (NSS), therefore, must consider these varying threats and ensure that the security sector can respond appropriately to each of them. An NSS provides a road map to determine priorities and allocation of resources to ensure both citizen and national security.

Key Questions for a Security Sector Assessment

What are the key legal frameworks and policies that currently address security? Are they up to date and publicly available?

Is there a commonly agreed upon definition of national security, public safety, and the security sector?

What dimensions of security does the current legal and policy framework address? Are there gaps, duplications, inconsistencies, or inadequacies that the NSS could address?

Are the security concerns of all members of the population accurately reflected in current legal policy frameworks for security provision, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, or other identity factors?

How are the national security threats and opportunities identified, assessed, analyzed, and reviewed?

How are threats and opportunities relevant to public safety identified, assessed, analyzed, and reviewed?

How have security policies and strategies been formulated in the past, and were citizens involved? Have they been successfully implemented and monitored?

What is the perception of citizens about their security and safety? Who sees the security sector as trustworthy actors they could turn to if they faced a security threat and who does not?

What international and/or regional commitments to security has the country already made? Have they been incorporated into domestic law?

What government agencies or institutions have responsibilities under the law for the provision, management, or oversight of the security sector?

How are security sector responsibilities mandated under the law and distributed among security sector actors? Do responsibilities overlap or intersect?

What mechanisms for cooperation or coordination among security actors exist?

Are security sector agencies and institutions sufficiently prepared to meet their responsibilities for security provision? What is their current level of capacity and are there gaps in personnel, equipment, or training?

What resources has the state invested previously in security, and what resources are available in the short, medium, and long term?

An NSS has to reflect both the way things are and a shared vision for how they should be. To formulate a strategy that can credibly lead towards a new situation it is critical to first assess the current state of affairs, existing capabilities, and likely developments. To do this, a typical starting point for National Security Strategy Development (NSSD) is an assessment of the current state of security sector management, oversight, and the roles and capabilities of the security sector.

A systematic assessment of the security environment allows for a clear and concise articulation of the national security problem statement—both challenges and opportunities—as well as likely impacts on the future of national security and public safety if no immediate action is taken.

An NSSD may originate from different actors, such as the Office of the President or Prime Minister, the passage of a legislative requirement by Parliament, or a requirement to develop and review an NSS on a regular basis, among others.



Purpose of an NSS

An NSS provides a unified national vision for defense and public security provision. It explains how a nation defines security and safety and how it intends to achieve it. An NSS describes the fundamental values a society prioritizes in providing for national security and public safety. It is also a practical document that allows all elements of the security sector to align their specific strategies and internal policies to achieve these objectives consistent with a society's values.

An NSS can serve these interests in a variety of contexts:

- » A stable democracy aiming to refine its security posture to evolving circumstances.
- » A transitioning democracy needing to align its security force structure and resources in line with the needs of citizens.
- » In reform contexts to facilitate an inclusive dialogue about the values and priorities of security provision and to bring clarity to the sequencing of reforms, including with international partners.
- » In conflict affected contexts as a means for stakeholders to discuss the terms of future security provision, thereby serving as a confidence-building tool that can make peace more sustainable.

Implementation will require responsible ministries and security institutions to develop their own sectoral plans and agency level strategies so that the missions and tasks laid out in the NSS are reflected in policies for capability development, force structures, procurement, training, and personnel.

Phases for Developing an NSS

There is no universal blueprint or approach for NSSD, though the following phases outline the common tasks involved. While listed chronologically, multiple phases can be conducted in parallel.

Overview Of An

Phase 1 Planning & Initiation

- Designate a process lead to take responsibility for planning and
- Conduct a feasibility study and map relevant stakeholders to inform
- Agree on steps, role, and timeline for the process methodology
- Estimate and allocate the required human and financial resources
- Develop a plan for public outreach and education
- Convene a drafting committee

Phase 2 Pre-Drafting: Assessments, Reviews & Analysis

- Prepare drafting committee for work: workshops on process, public
- Gather necessary data and analysis to inform drafting, e.g. commission
- Request and receive inputs from relevant government institutions
- Form working groups where necessary to consider particular questions

Phase 3 Drafting

- Define values, interests, threats, and opportunities and prioritize
- Produce a zero draft that is both values-driven and a practical blueprint
- Ensure a mechanism for monitoring of implementation and review

Phase 4 Consultation & Review

- Circulate zero draft, or parts thereof, for review
- Hold public forums, national dialogues, specialist workshops etc
- Align final draft with constructive feedback

Phase 5 Adoption & Approval

- Submit final draft to initiating authority, usually executive, for approval
- If parliamentary approval is not a formal requirement, submit final

Phase 6 Dissemination & Communication

- Ensure every government institution that needs to align their work
- Share NSS publicly through public service announcements and
- Raise awareness among security sector actors and the public about

Phase 7 Implementation, Monitoring & Review

- Responsible ministries and security institutions develop sectoral
- Initiating authority monitors progress on implementation according
- NSS may be reviewed, including insights gained from ongoing

NSSD Process

Managing the NSSD process, e.g. national security council
include

es

Purpose and outcomes

Commission background papers, conduct consultations and interviews, site visits, study

ns, e.g. capability reviews, threat assessments, and study analysis
questions or issues

the objectives accordingly

basis for the security sector to implement
review is included

c. to gather feedback and validate proposals

approval and adoption

final draft to voluntary parliamentary debate or vote of approval

work with the NSS has access to the strategy and is aware of their role in implementing it
by working with media outlets

at the values at the center of the new strategy and the expectations for behavior they set

plans and institution-level strategies so that the missions and tasks laid out in the NSS
ures, procurement, training, and personnel

ding to a mechanism stipulated in the NSS

oversight and monitoring

Key Lessons from NSSD

Each country's NSSD process is context specific. Reflecting its unique security environment, the process is complex, imprecise, and nonlinear. Following are some of the most salient lessons from the growing body of experience from African NSSD processes.

1. National Vision and Ownership

African NSSD processes have shown the importance of defining a commonly shared national security vision and values that are necessary for guiding the process and providing common ground for how security can be managed and delivered. This underscores the importance of national ownership as a condition for a successful NSSD process. Only a nation whose security is at stake can successfully define its own vision and action plan for security, vision, and funding.

2. Political Leadership

An effective NSSD requires harmonizing the vision and efforts of multiple agencies within a government. A successful NSSD process is as much about managing a complex political process as a technical exercise. Political leadership from the highest authority of the government is vital. In some cases, such a process is required by a law enacted by the parliament. This will enhance the legitimacy of the process as well as its effective implementation.

3. Trusted Platform for NSSD Process

Many security institutions and agencies suffer from intra- and inter-rivalry and silo politics. This makes it extremely counterproductive to entrust the process of NSSD to one specific security institution. In some countries, the NSSD process has been entrusted to a competent public think-tank affiliated with the government. In other instances, the National Security Adviser has facilitated the NSSD process. Although each country has its unique context, having a trusted platform for the NSSD process is critical for its success.

4. Institutional Audit and Review

In most cases, there is no need to start from scratch but from what is available in the security sector. Despite the dearth of national security strategies in Africa, there is a wealth of relevant strategies, policies, and legislations that can provide a foundation for the NSSD process. An institutional audit of the security sector is a pivotal step for identifying existing resources, division of labor, decision-making and coordination mechanisms, oversight and monitoring systems, and mapping of the relevant stakeholders.

5. Inclusive, Credible Process

Since an NSS is ultimately about protecting citizens, citizen perspectives have a vital role in the NSSD process. An NSS is strengthened when a wide range of stakeholders are involved in discussing, drafting, reviewing, and approving plans for national security and public safety, including:

- Military, police, intelligence, and border authorities
- Ministries of defense, international affairs, justice, and internal security
- Independent oversight bodies
- Ministries of foreign affairs, education, and public health
- Parliaments, especially committee members with governance and oversight roles related to security
- Community leaders and local or regional representatives, including traditional authorities
- Civil society actors and organizations
- Media professionals
- Ordinary citizens

6. Building Transparency, Trust, and Popular Support for NSSD

Consulting the public during NSSD builds transparency, trust, and popular support for a new NSS—one of the ongoing benefits of the process. Effective communication about the national security strategy advances public education on security policy and is central to building trust.

Formats for Public Consultation



The sharing of security information not only helps to ensure the public is informed, but it is also helpful in gaining popular support for national responses to any security threats. Winning the confidence of the public, in turn, facilitates the work of all a country's security providers.

7. NSSD Is an Iterative Process

The process of NSSD is expected to provide mechanisms for effective monitoring, evaluation, and periodic review that will make the NSS a living document that is adaptable to changes. Insights that arise from the implementation process should also be a trigger to initiate a new NSSD process when needed.

8. Filling the Knowledge Gap between Civilians and Security Professionals

A key challenge identified from previous NSSD experiences has been a trust deficit and knowledge gap between civilians and security actors on issues related to national security. This requires changes in attitude and aptitude to bridge such gaps and enable a common understanding.

These can be achieved by conducting a series of awareness-raising workshops on key concepts and processes of NSSD prior to starting the process. Some countries have established National Scientific Committees as a technical resource and sounding board for building consensus and resolving conflicts during the NSSD process.

The NSS Implementation and Monitoring Cycle



Conclusion

Africa's diverse and constantly shifting security landscape poses challenges to every government to provide security for its citizens. An NSS is not a panacea, but it provides a framework and process for adapting security efforts to better meet the needs of citizens and governments. Bringing about such change can be a daunting task without some structure and guidelines. Process matters. An inclusive and participatory approach can create a win-win mentality rather than a zero-sum game. Having a strategy, even an imperfect one, is better than not having one at all, as an imperfect strategy can be improved upon through learning and iterative adaption. A comprehensive version of the *National Security Strategy Development Toolkit for Drafting and Consultation* is available **here**: <https://africacenter.org/nssd-toolkit>



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