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# The role of weapon and ammunition management in preventing conflict and supporting security transitions

Preliminary findings and  
key policy considerations

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## **About UNIDIR**

The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)—an autonomous institute within the United Nations—conducts research on disarmament and security. UNIDIR is based in Geneva, Switzerland, the centre for bilateral and multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation negotiations, and home of the Conference on Disarmament. The Institute explores current issues pertaining to a variety of existing and future armaments, as well as global diplomacy and local tensions and conflicts. Working with researchers, diplomats, government officials, NGOs and other institutions since 1980, UNIDIR acts as a bridge between the research community and Governments. UNIDIR activities are funded by contributions from Governments and donor foundations.

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## Executive Summary

This paper presents preliminary findings on the role of weapon and ammunition management (WAM) in preventing conflict and supporting security transitions. The paper highlights observations from a series of national assessments on WAM frameworks conducted by States in cooperation with UNIDIR, with particular lessons drawn from four countries in Africa—the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Niger and Somalia. The objective of this paper is to promote knowledge on key issues and processes relevant to WAM in transitional settings, and to provide policy considerations for strengthening the role of WAM in preventing and managing conflicts and reducing armed violence.

### Supporting stabilization and preventing armed violence in countries in security transition

- WAM is becoming a key component of conflict prevention and stabilization strategies, with many conflict-affected and post-conflict States in Africa increasingly implementing a range of WAM activities. Eight States in Africa have conducted national-level consultations on WAM in cooperation with UNIDIR with the view to developing a roadmap towards a comprehensive national WAM framework.
- Development of national WAM roadmaps can support the establishment of a coherent and comprehensive system governing WAM, where evidence-based needs assessments would guide specific international support. National roadmaps on WAM can contribute to informing the development and review of regional strategies and action plans, such as the African Union's Silencing the Guns initiative, through information exchange, the setting of common priorities, and the sharing of lessons learned.
- WAM can contribute to reinforcing post-conflict recovery strategies through supporting the regulatory, operational and technical components of security sector reform (SSR), disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), as well as enforcing the obligations and objectives of arms embargoes. Through strengthening national capacity for the governance of weapons and ammunition, WAM can help to enable States targeted by sanctions to move towards an incremental lifting of punitive measures against them and improve adequate control over the full lifecycle of weapons and ammunition.
- Through mitigating the risks of diversions from national stockpiles, WAM measures can effectively disrupt one of the primary sources of supply of materiel for non-State armed groups and criminal networks, including terrorist groups. By limiting the availability of military materiel, WAM contributes to restricting the firepower of such armed groups, thereby potentially helping to de-escalate the conflict.
- Although the practice of identifying and tracing illicit weapons and ammunition is a key aspect of an effective WAM framework, it is still a weak component of WAM in most African States affected by conflict and armed violence. Tracing should be encouraged as it can actively support national and regional early warning mechanisms by identifying and highlighting growing demand for weapons in specific areas, or among particular groups, thereby contributing to the prevention of armed violence and de-escalation of conflict.
- WAM in non-mission contexts may pose several challenges for engaging international partners to provide assistance: there may be limited logistical frameworks on which to rely, less funding available, and no thorough technical field assessment to inform the design and identify entry points for programming. Further research is needed to support WAM programming design and operational support mechanisms in such settings.

## **Improving WAM of national stockpiles**

- WAM capacity has improved most significantly in the post-conflict period in countries where United Nations peace operations have been deployed, due to the presence of technical support and mobilization of dedicated funds from a range of international partners. United Nations peace operations are increasingly mandated to conduct WAM activities in support of national stockpile governance, management of DDR materiel, and processing of weapons seized and captured during operations by United Nations troops.
- Physical security and stockpile management (PSSM) for weapons and small arms ammunition is the most widely implemented WAM activity in all countries where national-level consultations were held. This reflects how PSSM is often viewed as the first, and the most common, measure to prevent diversions of weapons and ammunition. International partners in particular have supported PSSM because results are visible and relatively quick, compared to other WAM components. PSSM activities often have a strong buy-in from national forces, which see improvements in infrastructure and physical security of materiel as a priority in supporting their defence and security objectives.
- Management and destruction of larger calibre explosive ammunition remain a challenge in most environments where security forces lack the resources and technical capacity to process hazardous obsolete or surplus ammunition. In the past 15 years, a large number of States in Africa have suffered fatal unplanned explosions at munitions sites, which as a result triggered increased interest from national authorities in improving their management processes and capacity to handle explosive ammunition.
- To date, PSSM and record-keeping measures have focused primarily on the facilities of the main security forces. Capacity at field-level to conduct PSSM remains low, particularly in areas of military operations. Slowly, however, national authorities are starting to prioritize areas where terrorist groups are known to operate in order to deter 'quick win' terror attacks and provide greater protection to the security forces.
- PSSM activities, however, are often implemented separately from other essential WAM components—such as transfer controls, marking and record-keeping, as well as tracing—which are often neglected or under-developed. Effective WAM frameworks should situate PSSM within a wider lifecycle management framework. The development of a WAM roadmap would go some way towards supporting a comprehensive approach.

## **Managing weapons and ammunition in territories not under complete control of the State**

- WAM efforts in countries where national-level consultations were held focus almost exclusively on national stockpiles. There is a crucial lack of regulatory frameworks and procedures regarding materiel retrieved through DDR and other weapons collection activities, as well as that captured during military operations, fuelling the risk of diversion and misuse of materiel.
- The impact of civilian disarmament and weapons collection efforts remains very limited in increasingly complex operational contexts where peace agreements are not comprehensive and significant challenges exist for the State to provide security across its territory. In order to prevent interpersonal (including gender-based) armed violence, as well as communal and intercommunal armed violence, there is therefore a shift towards supporting civilians and other non-State actors in managing their own weapons and introducing controls rather than trying to remove them prematurely.

- Tracing can support the judicial process by providing the evidence upon which illicit traffickers and violence perpetrators can be convicted, thereby helping to address impunity. However, the consultations indicated that most African law enforcement agencies tend to regard the capture of illicit weapons as an end in itself, rather than a step in the investigative process and thus do not have procedures in place to process illicit materiel. Nevertheless, the recent resurgence of terrorist attacks in West Africa has contributed to boosting the security leadership's interest in the effective tracing of firearms and ammunition.

## Contents

1	Introduction .....	1
2	Managing arms transfers to States in transition .....	4
3	WAM frameworks: preventing illicit trafficking and excessive accumulation .....	10
4	Addressing illicit trafficking and possession .....	16
5	Reflections: strengthening WAM activities .....	20
6	Conclusion .....	24

## List of boxes

Box 1: Côte d'Ivoire: a WAM success story .....	13
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## List of figures

Figure 1: Proposed control process flow for arms imports and controls as part of exemption request .....	7
Figure 2: Observations on WAM coordination at the national level.....	11

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## List of acronyms and abbreviations

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
ATT	Arms Trade Treaty
CVR	Community violence reduction
DDR	disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
IATG	International Ammunition Technical Guidelines
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MOSAIC	Modular Small Arms Implementation Compendium (previously ISACS)
POA	Programme of Action on Small Arms
PSSM	physical security and stockpile management
SALW	small arms and light weapons
SOP	standard operating procedure
SSR	security sector reform
WAM	weapon and ammunition management

# 1 Introduction

**Years of armed violence, compounded with weak governance, have left a number of African States transitioning from conflict with weakened security apparatuses and limited operational capacity to exercise safe and secure management of weapons and ammunition.** These fragile contexts are prone to political violence and criminality, and are at a high risk of relapsing into conflict, with many of the key drivers remaining unaddressed, including weak control over national stockpiles and the illicit circulation of weapons and ammunition.

**Weak weapon and ammunition management (WAM) poses a significant challenge to peace, security and development.** The diversion of materiel can contribute to strengthening the capacity of armed spoilers. Illicit arms and ammunition are enablers of urban violence, displacement of people, human rights violations, and organized crime. Their misuse poses barriers to delivery of humanitarian services, protection of civilians and critical infrastructures, as well as investment and economic growth. In countries such as the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire (during time of war), the Niger and Somalia, national stockpiles, either of the State itself or of its neighbours, represent the primary source of weapons and ammunition for non-state armed groups, including terrorists. Conflict and armed violence also have a significant impact on the security sector and on the conduct of a nation's security forces. Inadequate WAM can contribute to the misuse of arms and ammunition by security forces and exacerbate situations of weak accountability and impunity.

As a result, **WAM is increasingly understood to be a fundamental component of recovery efforts and conflict prevention**, as reflected by the increasing amount of WAM programming being implemented across the globe, the development of international guidance and standards, including the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG)<sup>1</sup> and the Modular Small-arms control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC),<sup>2</sup> and the number of signatories to international and regional arms control instruments.<sup>3</sup>

This paper presents preliminary findings on the role of WAM in stabilization and security transition settings. The paper highlights observations from a series of national consultative assessments on WAM frameworks conducted by States in cooperation with UNIDIR, with particular lessons drawn from four countries in Africa—the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Niger and Somalia. In particular, this paper focuses on three key conflict drivers in which WAM plays a critical preventive role, namely:

1. destabilizing transfers of arms and ammunition to fragile contexts;
2. diversions from national stockpiles to unauthorized end-users; and
3. illegal trafficking, possession and misuse of weapons and ammunition.

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<sup>1</sup> The IATG were developed by the United Nations to ensure that the Organization as a whole consistently delivers high-quality advice and support in ammunition management to relevant stakeholders. The Guidelines were also developed for the use, on a voluntary basis, of national authorities wishing to improve the safety and security of ammunition stockpiles; see <https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/ammunition/iatg/>.

<sup>2</sup> MOSAIC, formerly known as the International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS), provide practical guidance on all aspects of small arms and light weapons control, including legislation, programme design and operational support; see <http://www.smallarmsstandards.org/about-isacs.html>.

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of regulatory frameworks and interlinkages between arms control and conflict management agendas, see A. Boutellis, *The Changing Role of Conventional Arms Control in Preventing and Managing Conflicts*, UNIDIR, 2018.

## 1.1 METHODOLOGY

During 2016–2018 UNIDIR supported the implementation of national weapon and ammunition baseline assessments in eight countries in Africa affected by armed violence or transitioning from a state of conflict.<sup>4</sup> Led by national authorities, these in-country consultations aimed at establishing a baseline of the existing WAM activities in place in each country, identifying areas to be strengthened, and presenting recommendations for programmatic and policy responses to build or strengthen the national frameworks governing arms and ammunition.

**WAM is the oversight, accountability and management of arms and ammunition throughout their lifecycle, including establishment of frameworks, processes and practices for safe and secure materiel acquisition, stockpiling, transfers, tracing and disposal.** The consultations focused on all aspects of WAM, including legislation, administrative processes, technical capacity and capacity-building, and resource mobilization. During the in-country consultative assessments, relevant national experts and international partners covered the full cycle of management of conventional weapons and ammunition based on the following 10 pillars:

1. national legal framework governing weapons, ammunition and their management;
2. institutional arrangements to coordinate WAM policy and activities;
3. transfer controls on weapons and ammunition, including import, export, brokering, transit and trans-shipment;
4. marking of weapons and ammunition;
5. record-keeping of weapons and ammunition;
6. processing and management of seized and captured weapons;
7. physical security and stockpile management;
8. weapon and ammunition collections and amnesties;
9. policies and practices for dealing with artisan-produced weapons; and
10. disposal of weapons and ammunition.

Each national consultation resulted in a substantive and practical report, outlining a roadmap towards a sustainable national WAM framework. In each consultation, the national authorities identified options to strengthen WAM, which were validated during the consultative process.

These reports provided the main basis for the analysis in this paper, with specific lessons drawn from four case studies.<sup>5</sup> While weak WAM practices are common to all four countries, each case presents different contexts and sets of challenges. Specific variations were observed in terms of WAM capacity, stage of conflict, types of armed violence, United Nations presence and arms embargoes, as well as conflict prevention efforts.

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<sup>4</sup> Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, the Niger, Nigeria and Somalia.

<sup>5</sup> UNIDIR, *Towards a National Framework on Weapons and Ammunition Management in Somalia*, 2015; UNIDIR. The case studies relating to the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire and the Niger (*Towards a National Framework on Weapons and Ammunition Management in the Central African Republic*, 2017; UNIDIR, *Towards a National Framework on Weapons and Ammunition Management in Côte d'Ivoire*, 2017; UNIDIR, *Towards a National Framework on Weapons and Ammunition Management in Niger*, forthcoming) are not publicly available.

- **The Central African Republic** presents a case study in which the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) is supporting national authorities in implementing a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) / community violence reduction (CVR) programme and security sector reform (SSR), as well as WAM activities, despite the absence of a comprehensive peace agreement and the lack of full territorial control by the national authorities. An arms embargo limits the procurement of arms and ammunition by the Government, which has been calling for it to be lifted in order to re-equip a now severely depleted security sector. Consultations were organized in September 2017.
- **Côte d’Ivoire** has achieved a certain level of stability and armed violence has significantly decreased since the end of the crisis in 2011. In this post-conflict environment, the national authorities have been able to actively tackle WAM issues with the support of the international community, particularly the United Nations. Consultations were held in September 2016, a few months after the Security Council decided to renew the mandate of United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI) for a final period<sup>6</sup> and terminated the sanctions regime, including the arms embargo.<sup>7</sup> This transitional period offers another interesting context in which, on the one hand, the national authorities are now fully permitted to import arms and ammunition while, on the other hand, international support for WAM and attention to illicit trafficking has significantly decreased. Nevertheless, WAM challenges persist, including illicit arms possession and the existence of substantial private arms caches outside the State’s control.
- While there is no United Nations peace operation in **the Niger**, the country suffers from significant levels of armed violence, including terrorism, as well as illicit arms trafficking. Grievances from the last rebellion in 2008 have been left largely unaddressed—despite efforts to implement a DDR programme. In addition to violent intercommunal tensions, the State is struggling against resurgent terrorist threats from Boko Haram and foreign-based extremist groups. A new DDR programme aimed at Boko Haram members was launched in 2018. Consultations were held in September 2018 at a time when security forces of the Niger and their armouries were under regular attack by terrorist groups. The State is host to and cooperates with foreign military forces boosting its military capacity, and is actively participating in a range of regional counter-terrorism operations.
- **Somalia** continues to experience significant security and developmental challenges. With the support of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), deployed since 2007, the national authorities continue to conduct military operations against al-Shabaab. While significant challenges remain, commendable efforts have been made to rebuild the Somali security sector and the WAM capacity of the security forces, which supported the partial lifting of the arms embargo in 2013. The Somali authorities are currently in the process of implementing a comprehensive set of WAM activities. The political will of the authorities to implement WAM was clearly reflected in the consultative process organized in cooperation with the Federal Government of Somalia and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), which was initiated in June 2015.

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<sup>6</sup> See S/RES/2284 (2016).

<sup>7</sup> See S/RES/2283 (2016).

## 2 Managing arms transfers to States in transition

Countries transitioning from conflict continue to suffer from recurring or pervasive armed violence when cultures of violence remain and are compounded by ready unauthorized access to arms and ammunition. Moreover, when such countries have fragile peace agreements with incomplete DDR programmes they are at a high risk of relapsing into war. WAM baseline assessments have been conducted by national authorities in cooperation with UNIDIR in countries where peace agreements are not comprehensive, as in the Central African Republic; where a number of weapons caches remain under the control of former rebel leaders, as in Côte d'Ivoire; or where terrorist groups are exploiting the lack of governance and capacity of the State to provide security to increase their influence, as in the Niger and Somalia. Transfers of weapons and ammunition into such volatile environments where WAM activities are not systematic can have a significant destabilizing effect on national security and also fuel regional tensions.

Conflicts and the resultant legacy of violence, distrust and weak rule of law and security institutions have a significant impact on a State's ability to manage its national stockpiles, particularly its procurement procedures and related accountability. After conflict, acquisition processes are rarely subjected to national or interagency oversight, or needs-based assessments. To mitigate the risk emanating from these shortcomings, both exporting and importing States can agree and implement a range of arms control safeguards suited to their situations. For example, articles 7 and 11(2) of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) require that exporting States Parties assess the risk of serious misuse and risk of diversions before transfers of conventional arms are authorized. Such pre-export control measures are critical for preventing any further destabilizing transfers being made into already fragile contexts, potentially fuelling a resumption of armed violence.

As for the importing State, authorities are required to adopt regulations and establish importing procedures, in line with international obligations. For example, the importing State must respect United Nations arms embargo provisions if the State is under such sanctions, and also implement regular reporting commitments under international and regional arms control instruments, for instance under the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials and the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, that serve as transparency tools for both international and national scrutiny.

### 2.1 SUPPORTING SECURITY SECTOR REFORMS

Years of armed violence in those States in which WAM baseline assessments were conducted have had a significantly negative impact on the capacity of their security sectors and their ability to manage lethal materiel adequately. During security transition, security providers include a range of State and non-State actors which may or may not be formally integrated into the sector, creating opportunities for both reconciliation and resentment. Security sectors may remain divided, with little trust existing among or within forces. A common tension often presents itself at this stage between, on the one hand, the need to support security sector capacity-building and re-equip forces to be able to ensure much needed security provision during a transitional period, and on the other hand, the heightened risk that materiel transfers could threaten to impede security in volatile and transitioning political contexts. During such a stage, States often still lack effective systems of WAM and governance in an environment that remains extremely tense.

In such conditions, transfers of arms and ammunition to security forces can easily pose a significant risk of contributing to misuse of the materiel, including in violations of human rights, whether

through mismanagement and failure to prevent diversion to unauthorized users, or arising from a lack of security force training and accountability in international use of force standards.

A review of the findings from WAM consultations indicates that **WAM activities play an essential role in conflict-affected environments in the application of arms and ammunition control measures and specific safeguards to mitigate the risk of diversion and misuse of transfers, as well as in reforming security sectors, through encouraging the adoption of processes, procedures and developing stronger institutional accountability and cohesion.**

### **2.1.1 Structuring the sector: conducting inventory and needs assessment-based procurement**

At the cessation of conflict, the structure and composition of national security forces may be generally unclear, as is the status of much of the materiel that remains in national stockpiles. Many African States transitioning from conflict undertake substantial security sector reforms, which often involve the procurement of new arms and ammunition. Inventories and record-keeping—which require a review of existing stocks and the serviceability of materiel, as well as identifying surplus—are key to completing an effective needs assessment and compatibility review before materiel is procured; however, these are often the two essential WAM components that States in transition have the most difficulty to implement (see section 3.3).

Consultations revealed that the absence of effective needs assessments routinely resulted in the transfer of inadequate or unnecessary items (for example, Côte d'Ivoire and the Niger). Excessive accumulation of arms and ammunition represents a well-documented driver of conflict, which can result from direct over-procurement by national authorities, or from transfers of materiel through bi- or multilateral military cooperation.

In States hosting foreign military forces, or conducting significant counter-terrorism operations (for example, the Niger and Somalia), the State's security forces are benefiting from the provision of training and supply of arms and ammunition from a range of international partners. In the Niger, for instance, with the ramping up of its military counter-terrorism activity—including the deployment of foreign forces across its territory—and its participation in several regional military operations, the Government is currently receiving significant military support from the international community, including supplies of weapons and ammunition. Consultations with stakeholders in the Niger highlighted that materiel transferred to the armed forces has not always been procured on the basis of a prior needs assessment of items identified by the national authorities, and that facilities and procedures in place are not yet sufficient to manage the new materiel in line with international standards and guidelines, increasing the risk of mismanagement.

In contrast, after the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, authorities conducted a weapons-marking programme, which resulted in a baseline inventory of materiel. Notifications of materiel made by the authorities to the United Nations during the last stage of the arms embargo indicated that acquisitions were in line with the needs of the State in terms of quantity and types, reflecting improvements in military planning.<sup>8</sup>

**These considerations highlight a challenge at the strategic level in terms of procedures for procurement decision-making as well as at the operational level to determine serviceability and the means of disposal of surplus and unserviceable materiel.**

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<sup>8</sup> UNIDIR, *Applying Conventional Arms Control in the Context of Arms Embargoes*, 2018, p. 53.

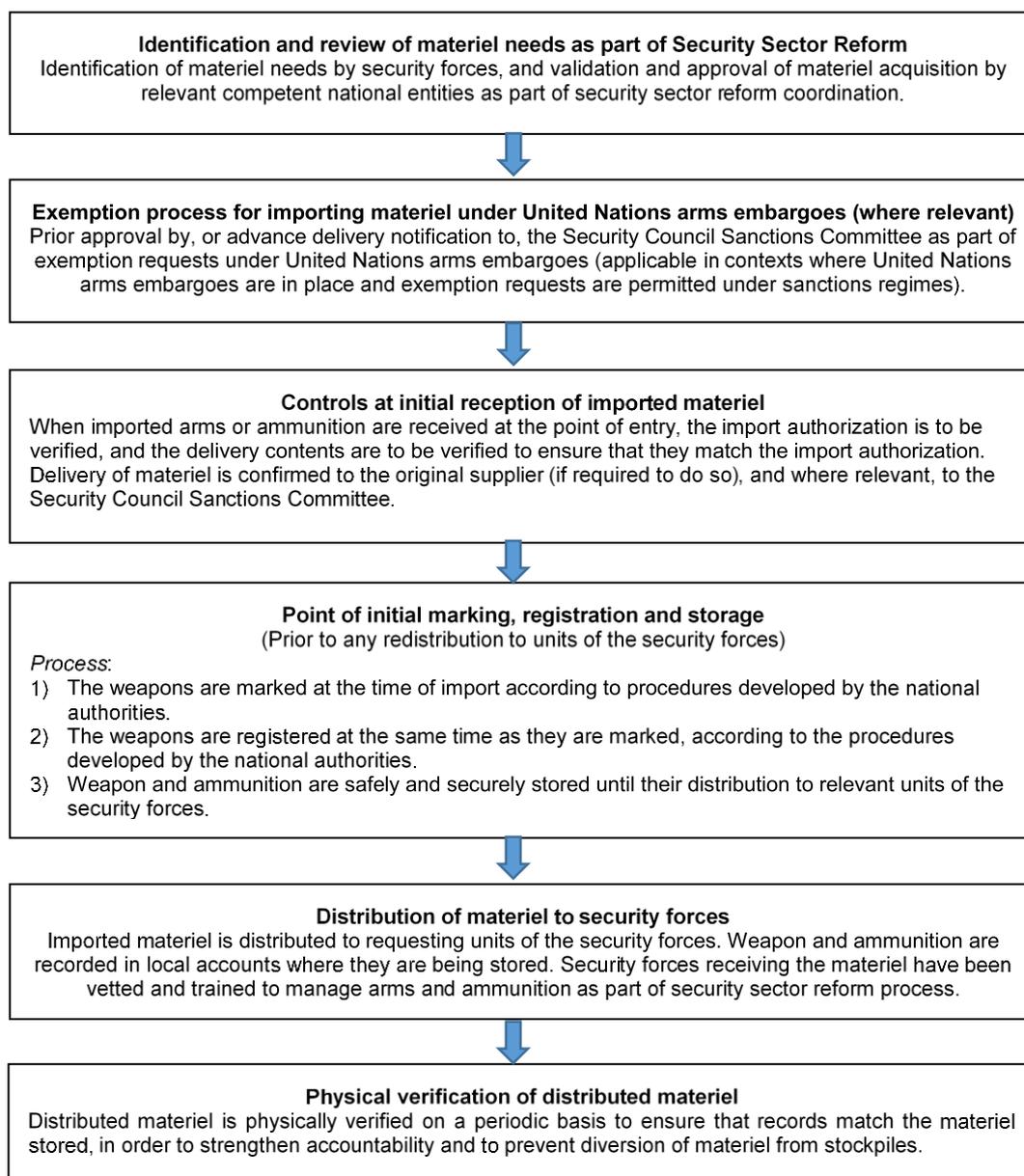
### **2.1.2 Supporting cohesiveness: ensuring national oversight over procurement**

Consultations on the subject of WAM in conflict-affected environments in Africa indicate that procurement is rarely a centralized process that is assessed and decided upon, with parliamentary oversight, by a single national or inter-agency body. It is not uncommon for each relevant ministry to operate its own procurement channel—while the police might ordinarily procure through the Ministry of Interior, the military would go through the Ministry of Defence (for example, the Central African Republic, Liberia, and the Niger). A minority of States consulted even reported that each branch of their military and security forces has its own procurement channel. This reflects a lack of coordination at best, but perhaps more worryingly, a level of division within the security sector itself, brought on by the dynamics and pressures of the conflict, and a general desire by each force to manage its own procurement and to choose its own commercial partners. The absence of national oversight of acquisitions results in a lack of transparency and accountability, which brings with it several key risks, including the excessive accumulation of materiel, high vulnerability to corruption and the misuse of limited national financial resources. In the case of ECOWAS States, this also implies that the national authorities are not in a position to comply with ECOWAS regulations that require States to seek an exemption request from its secretariat for any transfer of arms and ammunition, weakening this important regional arms control effort.

In post-conflict contexts, governments and security forces consider it urgent to impose control over territory and potential spoilers in the face of a range of continuing internal and external threats; in response, States have tended to increase military expenditures significantly. While weapons and ammunition might only account for part of the defence and security budget, increased military spending can negatively impact other key portfolios, such as health and education. Evidence-based needs assessments and accountability for military expenditures are therefore key requirements to preventing destabilizing arms procurements.

Some States, particularly those that have been under embargo (for example, Côte d'Ivoire and Somalia), have managed to implement a single overarching procurement mechanism in response to obligations relating to transfer notifications and exemption procedures (see section 2.2). This ensures stronger national oversight of procurement, helping to mitigate corrupt practices and ensure more strategic and well-planned acquisitions and spending on arms and ammunition. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the State centralized its procurement mechanism for all security forces so that it falls under one institution—the National Security Council. The Council manages all arms and ammunition imports into the country based on an 'expression of need' by the security forces, and is responsible for ensuring that all requirements are in place right up to the point of delivery. A similar centralized process for managing arms acquisitions is being explored in the Central African Republic. Figure 1 presents a proposed centralized control model for managing arms imported as part of an arms embargo exemption, drawing from lessons in the Central African Republic and Somalia.

**Figure 1: Proposed control process flow for arms imports and controls as part of exemption request**



**Arms and ammunition-supplying States have an important role in supporting the consolidation of national frameworks by adhering to established structures and processes and ensuring that they do not bypass the import control systems.**

Accurate record-keeping (see section 3.3) of newly acquired arms and ammunition forms the basis for reporting under regional and international mechanisms, including the ATT and the United Nations Register as well as United Nations arms embargoes, where applicable. **Transparency in military acquisitions is critical to building trust among States and contributing to reducing tensions, as well as facilitating national oversight of procurement mechanisms.**

However, few of the African States in conflict or post-conflict situations that have conducted WAM baseline assessments fulfil their reporting obligations, mostly due to lack of awareness, political will, or resources but also to the reluctance of the armed forces leadership to share what they consider sensitive data. In the Niger, for instance, national focal points for United Nations transparency

instruments regretted not being provided with data by a number of security forces, preventing them from being able to report under those instruments. This also impedes the implementation of certain regional arms control reporting obligations, such as those stipulated by the ECOWAS Convention, significantly undermining regional strategies to curb illicit arms trafficking and armed violence, such as the African Union's Silencing the Guns initiative.

The majority of States that have conducted WAM baseline assessments have signed or ratified the main regional and international arms control instruments, including the ATT. States that have been hosting United Nations missions with substantive WAM mandates have demonstrated particularly strong commitments to international instruments. For instance, Côte d'Ivoire has been submitting reports on the implementation of the Programme of Action (PoA) on Small Arms regularly, as well as under the International Tracing Instrument, and has submitted an initial report under the ATT.

## 2.2 SUPPORTING IMPLEMENTATION AND OBJECTIVES OF ARMS EMBARGOES

There are currently nine United Nations sanctions regimes in effect that include arms embargo provisions, including seven in Africa.<sup>9</sup> Arms embargoes are adopted by the Security Council as one of its primary tools to maintain and restore international peace and are tailored to specific contexts using different levels of restrictions regarding the possibility of exemptions.<sup>10</sup> WAM baseline assessments were conducted in two countries currently under a United Nations embargo, the Central African Republic and Somalia, as well as two countries formerly under a United Nations embargo, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia,<sup>11</sup> offering an array of restrictions and WAM obligations that seek to ensure that exempted transfers do not frustrate the sanctions regime's objectives and contribute to better security provision.

### 2.2.1 Assessing WAM capacity as a condition for easing arms embargoes

In the early stages of Security Council sanctions regimes, arms embargoes are generally comprehensive with provisions related to national authorities eased overtime. Until recently, arms embargoes were reviewed together with other components of the regime,<sup>12</sup> taking into account progress made towards stabilization or the security needs of national authorities to provide law enforcement or to combat terrorism. However, the capacity of national authorities to manage weapon and ammunition arsenals and stockpiles was not always assessed or taken into consideration by the Security Council when easing embargoes. On several occasions, the premature easing of arms embargoes has been followed by diversions of materiel to non-State armed groups further fuelling insecurity.

In order to address this issue, the Security Council recently requested an assessment of national WAM capacities in two countries where there are sanctions in place—the Central African Republic<sup>13</sup> and Somalia.<sup>14</sup> In the case of Somalia, in 2014 the Security Council requested the Secretariat to conduct an in-country assessment to identify options and recommendations for the provision of technical assistance to the Government to support it in complying with embargo requirements and reinforcing its WAM capacity. Likewise, in 2017, the Security Council requested the Secretariat to

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<sup>9</sup> See list of United Nations sanctions regimes at <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/information>.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/applying-conventional-arms-control-in-the-context-of-united-nations-arms-embargoes-en-718.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Both arms embargoes were lifted in 2016; see UNIDIR, *Applying Conventional Arms Control in the Context of United Nations Arms Embargoes*, 2018, <http://unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/applying-conventional-arms-control-in-the-context-of-united-nations-arms-embargoes-en-718.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to an arms embargo, most sanctions regimes include a travel ban and an asset freeze.

<sup>13</sup> See S/RES/2339 (2017) and S/RES/2399 (2018).

<sup>14</sup> See S/RES/2142 (2014).

identify specific benchmarks against which to reassess the arms embargo in the Central African Republic. Subsequently the Secretary-General issued a letter on 31 July 2018 to the President of the Security Council with three proposed benchmarks to assess the arms embargo in the Central African Republic: 1) progress on the security sector reform; 2) progress on national WAM capacity; and 3) progress on effective monitoring and management of borders to address illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons.<sup>15</sup>

### **2.2.2 Managing authorized transfers to States under embargo and preventing diversions**

Post-conflict States, particularly those where arms embargoes have been in place and lifted or partially lifted, may decide to revive old arms deals and brokering networks. This presents a number of significant threats: as in other States in transition, the full content and serviceability of stockpiles is rarely documented, needs assessments have generally not been conducted, and the trading networks that existed prior to the imposition of the embargo may be reconnecting with the authorities. This presents a risk that purchase of unnecessary materiel will add to existing stocks, which may be obsolete or unserviceable.

To help mitigate against such risks, the Security Council's incremental lifting of arms embargo restrictions is increasingly accompanied by obligatory conditions to implement WAM measures. Somalia has been the main testing ground for these efforts. The partial lifting of the embargo in 2013 introduced exemptions for the transfer of arms and ammunition to re-equip the Somali security forces in its fight against al-Shabaab. Through subsequent resolutions, the Security Council imposed a series of arms control obligations to support the authorities in their management of weapons and ammunition. These included notifying the United Nations sanctions committee prior to any transfers, as well as confirming delivery and providing precise information regarding the end user and place of storage. The Security Council requested the establishment of a Joint Verification Team to conduct routine inspections of national stockpiles, inventory records and supply chains.<sup>16</sup> Finally, Somalia was requested to conduct a baseline inventory of military equipment, including arms and ammunition, held by its armed forces, which would be assessed against their respective strengths and needs.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the obligatory imposition of such WAM practices by the Security Council and the efforts of national authorities to implement them, States that remain under sanctions and lack sufficient regulatory capacities still face a high risk of diversions of materiel. In order to further mitigate against the risks and impacts of transfers to unauthorized end users, for Somalia and Côte d'Ivoire (when under embargo) the Security Council voted to keep restrictions in place on the imports of certain categories of materiel that it deemed particularly sensitive and destructive, including man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) and other light and heavy weapons systems.<sup>18</sup>

Requesting States under embargo to make serious efforts to strengthen their national WAM frameworks and capacities may form a basis for dialogue with the Security Council to consider the reassessment of arms embargo. That is likely to support sustaining of good practices once sanctions have been lifted and mandates of relevant United Nations peace or political missions have been terminated.

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<sup>15</sup> See S/2018/752.

<sup>16</sup> See S/RES/2182 (2014).

<sup>17</sup> See S/RES/224 (2015).

<sup>18</sup> See annexes of S/RES/2111 (2013) and S/RES/2153 (2014).

### 3 WAM frameworks: preventing illicit trafficking and excessive accumulation

**The baseline consultations in each of the four States examined provide confirmation that one of the main sources of illicit weapons and ammunition is poorly managed national stockpiles.** Diversions contribute to arming non-State actors and terrorist groups and, by increasing their military capacity, to prolonging conflicts and perpetuating violations of human rights. Diversions from national stockpiles occur mainly after the loss of territorial control to non-State actors or from direct attacks and, to a lesser extent, as a result of thefts involving security personnel.

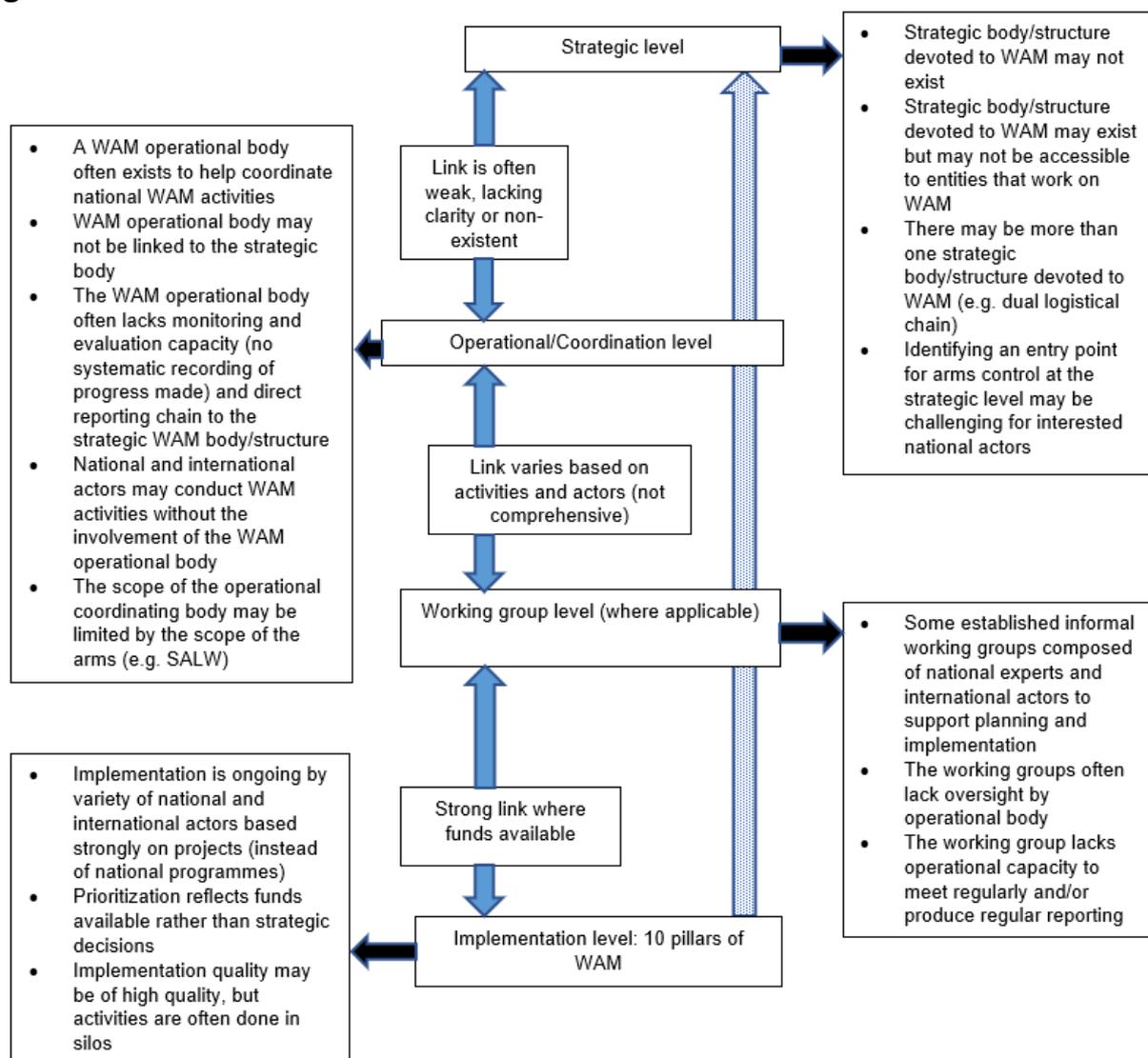
In order to mitigate against these risks in the future, a number of States in post-conflict transition have made substantial efforts towards establishing effective WAM systems, including with regard to infrastructure, legislation, national management standards and procedures, technical capacity, as well as fulfilling commitments to relevant international and regional instruments. National ownership and political will to establish, maintain and implement WAM is crucial since it shapes and defines the resources dedicated to the issue, the implementation of international/regional arms control instruments, and the institutional framework.

Further, WAM support has become a critical part of the United Nations stabilization toolkit in conflict-affected areas, with some peace operations, including MINUSCA and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), having particularly strong and detailed mandates on this front. Countries where United Nations and regional operations are deployed appear to be those where WAM capacity has improved most significantly in the post-conflict period.

#### 3.1 NATIONAL COORDINATION

Baseline assessments indicate that national authorities are increasingly acknowledging the importance of national WAM coordination mechanisms to ensure coherent, effective planning and implementation of activities and policies at the strategic and operational levels. In several States (for example, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and the Niger), national small arms and light weapons (SALW) commissions, generally well placed within the governing apparatus, have been identified as the body in charge of coordinating WAM; however, their scope remains too narrow and their operational capacity often too limited. Most States currently have more than one institution involved in WAM coordination, while lacking centralized coordination at the strategic level. Further, the linkages between strategic, operation and tactical levels for WAM vary considerably based on various factors, including availability of international assistance. WAM efforts would therefore benefit from the establishment of a centralized national mechanism, appropriately placed within the governing apparatus, and with a strong dedicated mandate and scope. Figure 2 presents key findings with regard to national coordination on WAM.

**Figure 2: Observations on WAM coordination at the national level<sup>19</sup>**



Situations where United Nations or regional peace missions are present attract a range of international partners willing to provide funding and technical support to implement WAM-related activities. Participants in several of the consultative processes highlighted the strong support from international partners but regretted the lack of national coordination, often resulting in projects being implemented in silos and a duplication of efforts, as well as a lack of follow-up. Several consultations identified activities being implemented based on the donor’s agenda, rather than on needs-based assessment. In several cases, poorly coordinated support from the international community resulted in too many similar training sessions being delivered and, with the absence of WAM national guidelines and standards, in significant discrepancies in standards, practices and procedures (for example, the Niger and Somalia). A national WAM framework requires the design and adoption of guidelines and regulations, including standard operating procedures (SOPs).

### 3.2 PHYSICAL SECURITY AND STOCKPILE MANAGEMENT

Effective physical security and stockpile management (PSSM) of weapons and ammunition is critical to ensure safety and security, as well as oversight and accountability of arms and ammunition and

<sup>19</sup> Observations drawn by UNIDIR from the series of national assessments on WAM frameworks conducted during 2016–2018.

to prevent diversions from government stockpiles to unauthorized end users. PSSM involves ensuring adequate physical storage infrastructure, and improvements in stockpile management and accounting—ranging from procedures governing the access of personnel to stocks, assessment and surveillance of ammunition stability and conditions, to the physical separation and storage quantity limits of different types of explosive materiel.

Further, adequate national regulation and management of ammunition in line with international best practice and guidelines, such as the IATGs, are essential to mitigating or avoiding unplanned explosions of ammunition storage facilities (see section 5.5). **Explosions caused by negligence, accident or sabotage can have dire humanitarian and social consequences, including civilian casualties, damage to critical infrastructure, as well as displacement, in sensitive contexts recovering from conflict.** Côte d'Ivoire and the Niger have suffered several deadly incidents in the past 15 years and have made substantial efforts to refurbish old storage facilities and build new ones in compliance with the IATG.

**Improving storage facilities for weapons and small arms ammunition is the WAM measure on which most national and international efforts have been focused to date.** Most States where consultations took place have achieved notable results in refurbishing and building storage facilities. However, baseline assessments also identified a number of common shortcomings to these efforts, including discrepancies in PSSM capacity across national territory, and limited SOPs and coordination of activities implemented with the support of international partners.

An increasing number of African States are facing serious threats from terrorism and have launched military operations to counter them, for instance in the Niger and Somalia. The baseline assessments in these States highlighted a lack of PSSM capacity, including measures for transportation, storage and record-keeping of arms and ammunition at field level, particularly where military operations are deployed, resulting in regular losses and looting. In the Niger, arms and ammunition storage facilities that are located far from urban centres in regions where terrorist groups operate are prone to regular and deadly attacks. In the course of the consultations, the national authorities identified these areas as a priority in their PSSM strategy in order to protect their personnel and infrastructure. There is a need to ensure that storage facilities are better protected from insurgents, which use attacks against security positions as a key method of arms and ammunition procurement.

## Box 1: Côte d'Ivoire: a WAM success story

The baseline assessment in Côte d'Ivoire found that PSSM capacities and skilled personnel were adequate. The Ivorian authorities have invested significant resources in improving PSSM capacity and building a strong WAM framework. Assessments were conducted, national PSSM guidelines were published, more than 80 ammunition and 140 weapons storage facilities were modernized, refurbished or rebuilt, technical training sessions were delivered, and SOPs compliant with international standards and guidelines were developed. The consultations highlighted a **combination of essential factors** that were instrumental in this success and without which WAM would be very difficult to implement and sustain. These included:

- a high degree of national ownership and political will in the government, which created a National SALW Commission with significant funding and human resources;
- an effective sensitization campaign by the SALW Commission of the political and security forces leadership resulting in strong buy-in;
- well-trained Ivorian security forces with previous expertise in WAM;
- a United Nations peace operation with an important arms control component,<sup>20</sup> including a United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) team on the ground and funding from donors; and
- a thorough national survey on SALW and PSSM assessments on the ground contributing to the development of an evidence-based PSSM strategy.

## 3.3 ACCOUNTING FOR ARMS AND AMMUNITION

### 3.3.1 Marking of weapons

Accounting for weapon and ammunition stocks, and tracking their movement along the chains of supply and distribution from reception to use and disposal, is a prerequisite for effective management of materiel and for preventing diversions. This relies on the ability to identify each weapon individually and to record, preserve and update data using a database. Marking campaigns also enable national authorities to inventory national stockpiles of weapons and identify obsolete and unserviceable items. **A coherent national system for marking weapons is a crucial conflict and crime prevention mechanism in a WAM system as it contributes to dissuading personnel from selling materiel on to unauthorized end users, and also helps to enable the identification of a diversion and the original stockpile from which weapons were taken, and the prosecution of individuals responsible** (see section 4.2). Marking systems and tracing measures as part of a regional strategy are even more effective measures for tackling regional and cross-border insecurity dynamics. The ECOWAS marking system, for example, ensures that arms diverted from member States will be identifiable and will trigger national or cross-border investigations.

Most States that have organized baseline assessments are parties to international or regional instruments requiring the marking of weapons at the point of importation—these include the Firearms Protocol (for example, the Central African Republic, Liberia and Nigeria), and a number of States have ratified the ECOWAS and Kinshasa Conventions.

While Côte d'Ivoire has marked around 90 per cent of State-owned weapons in the five years after the cessation of conflict, achievements by other States remain far more modest and vary widely.

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<sup>20</sup> See S/RES/2284 (2016).

Marking efforts in Somalia have focused primarily on marking weapons at the point of importation. Several other States have procured technical equipment and have launched marking activities but have not sustained their initial efforts, resulting in limited results. Designing a clear and detailed marking strategy, which provides clarity on authorization processes, methods and practices, is critical to successful WAM programming. In addition to significant funding and technical challenges regarding the provision of equipment, training, and skilled personnel in insecure and expansive territories, baseline assessments consistently highlighted the lack of support from security forces leadership, who tend to perceive marking and record-keeping as a low priority at best, and at worst a breach of sensitive information required for national security.

In addition, marking of captured weapons remains a problem across the continent, due to a general lack of clarity on relevant policies and procedures at the strategic and operational levels. National authorities that integrate captured weapons into their stockpiles (for example, the Central African Republic, the Niger and Somalia), as well as regional security operations (such as AMISOM or G5 Sahel, or United Nations peace operations) that retrieve or seize weapons during security operations, do not consistently mark or register weapons prior to disposal, resulting in lack of traceability for the materiel (see sections 3.3 and 4.2).

### 3.3.2 Record-keeping

Once marked, weapons must be recorded. **Recording weapons and ammunition appropriately is one of the cornerstones of maintaining a WAM system: not only is it indispensable for the effective management of weapons and ammunition throughout their full lifecycle from acquisition, through distribution to disposal, but it is also crucial for strategic procurement planning.**

Nevertheless, poor record-keeping remains one of the primary shortcomings among States in Africa. For instance, while regional instruments such as the ECOWAS Convention require States to create a national electronic database of State- and civilian-owned weapons, none of the four ECOWAS States that conducted consultations have implemented this provision due to a range of technical, financial and political challenges.

While some degree of modernization has been implemented at the level of headquarters regarding the digitization of data, most States use paper records at field level. Despite attempts to improve recording systems, and the provision of software and training, such efforts are not sustained. This is indicative of a lack of funding as well as significant technical and logistical challenges, particularly in regions with limited electricity and remote access hindering maintenance. **Moreover, the reluctance of security forces to share information with other security agencies remains a key obstacle to the development and implementation of national databases.**

## 3.4 DISPOSAL

Disposal of arms and ammunition can be implemented through a) destruction, b) domestic transfer to another security agency, or c) sale or donation to another State. **Destruction is recognized as the best disposal method for contributing to the prevention of violence.** In addition to reducing the amount of materiel in circulation, destroying surplus or unserviceable arms and ammunition can help reduce the risk of diversions, arming non-authorized end users, misuse, as well as unplanned explosions. The public destruction of captured or collected weapons after a civil war also sends an important message of hope to the general population, advertising commitment to the reconciliation and reconstruction process.

All baseline assessments, however, highlighted a lack of adherence with regional instruments on disposal. Participants in most consultations reported the integration of captured serviceable

weapons and ammunition directly into national stockpiles as the main method of disposal. Security forces in Africa also face difficulty in identifying and dealing with surplus materiel, which they perceive as a potential resource, particularly given procurement challenges due to financial constraints or the imposition of an arms embargo. There are generally no laws, guidelines, SOPs or clear authorization processes related to the identification and methods of disposal of surplus or processing collected or captured weapons and ammunition. Units and force commanders are often left to implement a method that suits their immediate needs—to integrate, distribute or leave it where it is. The existence of stocks of weapons waiting to be destroyed was also mentioned on several occasions, reflecting the general limited capacity of national authorities as well as national regulations for disposing of this materiel effectively.

## 4 Addressing illicit trafficking and possession

### 4.1 ADDRESSING WEAPONS BEYOND STATE CONTROL

One of the main post-conflict challenges with regard to WAM is the State's inability to effectively restore full control over and accountability for the possession of weapons and ammunition. There are several challenges. First, as in the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Niger or Somalia, non-State actors still control some territory or materiel they have looted from national armouries. Second, there is a high level of weapons possession among members of armed groups and among civilians. In order to address illicit possession and trafficking, most States have adopted multifaceted approaches depending on the circumstances, including DDR measures in parallel with civilian disarmament efforts, regulation of civilian weapons possession, and community sensitization to weapons management.

#### 4.1.1 Disarming combatants

DDR was originally designed in the 1990s as the leading United Nations post-conflict recovery programme. In principle, it was envisaged that armed groups, after signing a peace agreement, would dissolve and surrender their weapons, thereby putting an end to violence. However, in practice, peace agreements are increasingly non-comprehensive and DDR-related arms and ammunition collections have proven challenging with varied impact. This has resulted in large quantities of materiel remaining under the control of former combatants, fuelling illicit trafficking and other crimes, as well as a recurrence of conflict in most of those countries that underwent DDR.

Six United Nations peace operations are currently mandated to implement DDR, and in addition several States are implementing national DDR programmes without the assistance of the United Nations.<sup>21</sup> In both types of DDR settings, WAM systems remains critically weak. First, in many States where baseline assessments were conducted, serviceable weapons retrieved from national DDR programmes were integrated into national stockpiles without prior marking or proper registration. In addition to issues around accountability, this presents significant security concerns since the safety of materiel recovered during DDR efforts is very hard to ascertain and international guidelines therefore encourage its destruction.<sup>22</sup> Second, the management of DDR arms and ammunition by both the United Nations missions and national authorities may be complicated by a lack of necessary regulations, procedures, technical capacity and resources, which contribute to safety risks, as well as risk of diversion, as was the case in the Central African Republic and Côte d'Ivoire. For instance, assault rifles collected in Côte d'Ivoire after the post-electoral crisis in 2011 that were meant to have been destroyed, were recently seized from criminals by national authorities in Burkina Faso. These weapons were identified on the basis of the markings applied to them in Côte d'Ivoire in advance of being destroyed—further highlighting the effectiveness of marking efforts in countries in security transition (see section 3.3).

Over the past two years, the United Nations has been developing the WAM capacity of DDR sections with the publication of guidance<sup>23</sup> and by supporting training, which seeks to address the issue in light of changing contexts, covering traditional disarmament efforts as well as transitional WAM measures where disarmament is not an option, including in relation to community violence

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<sup>21</sup> See "Where are we doing it?", <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration>.

<sup>22</sup> See IATG 12.10, Ammunition on multi-national operations.

<sup>23</sup> See S. de Tessières, *Effective Weapons and Ammunition Management in a Changing DDR Context: A Handbook for DDR Practitioners*, Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Office of Disarmament Affairs, 2018, <https://www.un.org/disarmament/publications/more/ddr-handbook/>.

reduction (CVR) activities. CVR projects target high-risk areas hosting combatants and at-risk groups, and can include arms control activities supporting civilian weapons management in communities affected by armed violence or sensitizing communities to national weapons ownership legislation. In the Central African Republic, for example, community-based weapons collections have been conducted as part of CVR.

#### **4.1.2 Addressing illicit possession of arms and ammunition by civilians**

The widespread availability of illicit arms and ammunition among the civilian population in countries in post-conflict security transition impedes the return to peace and can create a pervasive environment of armed violence and insecurity. On the one hand, illicit possession of arms and ammunition fuels interpersonal violence and armed criminality, and stokes those conflict drivers that remain unaddressed, for example communal armed clashes over access to resources, as in the Niger or Nigeria. On the other hand, civilian possession of weapons reflects a feeling of insecurity and a genuine lack of security provision by the State.

Addressing civilian possession of arms and ammunition in post-conflict settings is a key part of national weapons control frameworks which complement other interventions, including DDR. Those national authorities that conducted consultations have designed and implemented a range of interventions around a) the legal frameworks governing weapons possession, b) civilian and community disarmament and weapons collections, and c) supporting communities to better manage their authorized arms and ammunition.

##### *National legislation*

Regulating the possession and use of weapons by private individuals and entities is a crucial pillar of all WAM frameworks. In most countries where consultations took place, national regulations governing the importation, possession, carriage, use and transfer of weapons are obsolete or incomplete. As a result, the national authorities in these countries have started to review the legislation in line with the obligations set out in international and regional instruments they have ratified (for example, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Niger and Somalia). Legislation should incorporate provisions for the licensing of weapons ownership and the criminalization of illegal possession, misuse and trafficking so that civilians are held accountable. In the Niger, a complete review of the legislation has taken place and a draft law is currently in the process of being adopted. In order to have an impact, legislation should be enforced, including the penalties for violations of provisions. Rule of law remains a significant challenge in many conflict-affected States that conducted WAM baseline assessments, where further emphasis should be placed on the enforcement of WAM legislation as an integral part of judicial and security sector reform.

##### *Civilian disarmament and weapons collections*

Voluntary disarmament interventions and collections—including amnesties (for example, Côte d'Ivoire)—were identified as the main WAM efforts being pursued to remove illicit weapons from civilian possession and circulation. While such interventions have indeed been implemented in most countries where consultations took place, participants mentioned the general lack of regulation and guidance to collect, register and dispose of materiel. In addition to insecurity, this lack of transparency regarding the materiel retrieved during civilian weapons collections does not incentivize communities to disarm and efforts have had limited results in most settings. However, removing the tools of violence from communities without addressing the root causes of violence and conflict is unlikely to have a sustainable impact on peace and security. Therefore, to succeed such initiatives need to be coupled with activities that create confidence and build trust in law enforcement. Further, national authorities should ensure that civilian disarmament and weapons

collection initiatives do not increase the vulnerability of communities or individuals to security threats.

### *Community-based WAM*

Civilian disarmament is difficult to meaningfully implement in contexts where armed crime is pervasive, and where the capacity of law enforcement remains weak, to the extent that individuals and communities are forced to provide for their own security. In these contexts, the focus of arms control practices has evolved and shifted from removing weapons from civilians to a more community-focused approach to WAM programming. In Somalia, for instance, national participants in the consultations suggested paving the way for weapons collections through awareness-raising campaigns in territories under State control; this could include sensitizing the population on existing legislation on firearms ownership, risks related to weapon and ammunition storage in households and communities, as well as weapons safety and handling.

## 4.2 INVESTIGATING MISUSE OF WEAPONS AND TRACING ILLICIT MATERIEL

Identifying and tracking the chain of custody of illicit weapons and ammunition back to the point where they became unlawful is a key aspect of effective WAM frameworks contributing to preventing armed violence and the escalation of conflict. Tracing can support the objectives of national authorities in identifying supply chains, detecting routes and understanding the functioning of national and cross-border trafficking networks, as well as developing targeted responses to disrupt them. **By highlighting growing demand for weapons in specific areas or among particular groups, tracing can play a key role in informing national and regional early warning mechanisms and preventing conflict.** Results from tracing can support the judicial process by providing the evidence upon which arms traffickers and perpetrators of armed violence are prosecuted. Convictions can thereby contribute to reducing impunity, which remains a crucial challenge in conflict and post-conflict environments.

However, capacity for the identification and tracing of weapons in States affected by conflict in the region remains extremely limited. This is also due to improper management of seized or captured weapons, poor technical resources, and a lack of awareness among national authorities of the benefits and utility of this activity. Consultations in the Central African Republic, the Niger and Somalia revealed that the security forces generally integrate seized or captured weapons directly into their own arsenals. This is frequently done without marking, registration and adequate record-keeping due to a lack of equipment and the absence of national regulations regarding how to deal with such weapons, thereby rendering domestic or international tracing initiatives highly challenging.

Domestic tracing involves trying to identify whether a specific weapon has been diverted from State-controlled stockpiles, including materiel used by security forces or under their custody, such as materiel captured in the course of military operations, or collected during disarmament interventions. A solid accounting system is a basic prerequisite for effective domestic tracing efforts. However, the absence of centralized databases (whether electronic or paper-based), in particular at field level (see section 3.3), often leads to modest results (for example, the Niger). By contrast, in Côte d'Ivoire, where security forces have developed electronic databases, the authorities have been able to trace numerous weapons collected during DDR back to their original stockpiles and successfully reintegrated them after having been marked and registered in line with ECOWAS Convention commitments.

International tracing efforts in the States where the baseline assessments were conducted remain almost non-existent, with a very limited number of requests submitted to other States by law

enforcement and security agencies, and only a very small number of requests processed by them from other States or from the Panels of Experts of United Nations sanctions committees. Panels of Experts, where they are mandated to do so, are responsible for monitoring the implementation of sanctions regimes, including arms embargoes, and investigating any breaches. Much of the evidence on which a successful investigation depends is based on effective tracing initiatives, and this evidence is critical for enabling new sanctions to be applied to individuals or groups of individuals that are identified as threatening the peace, security and stability of the affected country. As the primary international cooperation partner for several African States on the matter, INTERPOL has delivered training to local law enforcement agencies on the identification and tracing of weapons, and offers them access to a range of international tools to establish whether a weapon has been reported lost, stolen, trafficked or used in a crime, and to record newly identified illicit firearms (for example, Côte d'Ivoire, the Niger and Nigeria).

**Consultations indicate that law enforcement agencies tend to regard the capture of illicit weapons as an end in itself, rather than as an investigative lead.** This perception however is changing through the development of national forensic capacities. In the Niger, for instance, the police forensics laboratory is considered the best in the subregion<sup>24</sup> with significantly increased capacity thanks to support from international partners. The judiciary is increasingly using the findings from the laboratory to support investigations, particularly relating to cases of terrorism. The recent resurgence of terrorist attacks in West Africa has contributed to boosting the interest of national security and law enforcement leadership in the methods required for effective tracing of firearms and ammunition. In Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, the analysis of weapons and ammunition used in the deadly attack in Grand Bassam in 2016<sup>25</sup> shed a crucial light on patterns of activities linked to a series of attacks in the region and helped law enforcement and security agencies identify the terrorist network responsible for conducting those attacks. This sparked the interest of the national authorities, which then made a request for additional training and technical capacity-building for tracing.

Efforts are also being made in conflict-affected States by the United Nations and regional organizations to enhance the role that peace operations play in monitoring and tackling illicit flows of weapons. The mandate of AMISOM, for instance, requires all military equipment captured as part of offensive operations to be documented and registered.<sup>26</sup> However, the actual implementation of these provisions remains limited, reflecting a strong need for the United Nations and regional organizations to develop and implement relevant and practicable SOPs for this purpose.

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<sup>24</sup> A. Desmarais, *Le monitoring des armes au Sahel: Les institutions forensiques nationales*, Small Arms Survey, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> BBC, "Ivory Coast: 16 Dead in Grand Bassam Beach Resort Attack", 14 March 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35798502>.

<sup>26</sup> See S/RES/2385 (2017), op. 13.

## 5 Reflections: strengthening WAM activities

This paper explored the various impacts of WAM in addressing key conflict drivers and highlights a range of gaps in policymaking and programming. This section presents a series of preliminary observations regarding how to ensure that WAM fulfils its potential in supporting stabilization and preventing conflict. These observations were developed on the basis of national-level consultations conducted with key stakeholders in the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Niger and Somalia, and are intended to be considered both by national authorities and their international partners when developing WAM frameworks in post-conflict settings and violence-prone areas.

### 5.1 ENHANCING POLITICAL WILL FOR EFFECTIVE WAM FRAMEWORKS

Stakeholders who participated in the consultations in each of the four countries repeatedly emphasized **the critical need to secure buy-in and political will from the leadership of the national authorities for the development and implementation of an effective WAM framework**. This can be measured through:

- the level of commitment shown by the government in ratifying and implementing relevant regional and international arms control instruments;
- the structure and positioning of WAM institutional frameworks;
- the presence of a WAM strategy and supporting policy, as well as processes for decision-making; and
- the level of resources dedicated to WAM activities and willingness to work with international partners in the event these are not sufficient.

The Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Niger and Somalia have all committed themselves to relevant arms control instruments, including regional SALW control conventions and protocols,<sup>27</sup> reflecting a real desire to tackle the issue, with the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire and the Niger being also party to the ATT,<sup>28</sup> and the Central African Republic and Côte d'Ivoire having acceded to the Firearms Protocol.<sup>29</sup> However, their national legislation has not yet been updated to reflect these regional and international commitments and obligations. The implementation of control provisions therefore remains quite limited.

One of the commitments set by the regional arms control instruments, as well as the PoA, relates to the creation of a national coordinating body—such as a National SALW Commission—responsible for arms control policy, guidance and operational programming. The location of this body within the institutional architecture, and the rank or administrative level of the official in charge, will determine the extent to which it is able to achieve policy and programmatic impact and hold the attention of the highest authorities. In the Niger, the Commission falls under the remit of the Office of the President and is headed by a General of the Gendarmerie, which guarantees that the Commission is visible and has access to the highest levels of government. It therefore has a good degree of support from the security forces, which is often lacking as these commissions are civilian institutions.

An effective regulatory framework and an appropriately placed commission also requires dedicated financial and technical resources to achieve its mandate, and to develop WAM policies and

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<sup>27</sup> Côte d'Ivoire and Niger are party to the ECOWAS Convention, Central African Republic to the Kinshasa Convention and Somalia to the Nairobi Protocol.

<sup>28</sup> See <https://thearmstradetreaty.org/treaty-status.html?templateId=209883>.

<sup>29</sup> See [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=XVIII-12-c&chapter=18&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12-c&chapter=18&clang=_en).

implement activities systematically. The national authorities that participated in the consultations generally have limited national resource, but nevertheless they demonstrated a strong willingness to work with international partners to support their activities, including with United Nations bodies, bilateral actors and specialized non-governmental organizations such as the Mines Advisory Group and the Halo Trust (for example, the Niger and Côte d'Ivoire). However, participants in most of the consultations highlighted the lack of a clear action plan or coordination of activities by the national authorities, and an over-reliance on international partners.

## 5.2 BUILDING A NATIONAL ROADMAP TO WAM INTERVENTIONS

**A WAM roadmap agreed with critical national stakeholders could effectively establish national ownership of a coherent system of WAM activities, where evidence-based needs assessments would trigger specific international support rather than the other way around.** The findings of the national WAM baseline assessments, and the actionable options identified to build and implement a national WAM framework, can form the foundations on which to develop targeted roadmaps or action plans comprising detailed strategies and specific programmatic designs for each WAM pillar of activity. Such efforts could be facilitated with further international support underpinned by a resource mobilization strategy to implement the plan. Further, **such a roadmap may be linked or integrated into national security strategies to ensure coherence with broader national security and defence planning. Additionally, national roadmaps on WAM can contribute to informing the development and review of regional strategies and action plans, such as the African Union's Silencing the Guns initiative, through information exchange, the setting of common priorities, and the sharing of lessons learned.**

Analysis of the achievements and gaps in WAM activities by those States where consultations were held identified PSSM as the most developed of the 10 WAM pillars. However, PSSM activities are often implemented separately from other essential WAM components, such as transfer controls and tracing, which are often neglected. **Effective WAM frameworks should situate PSSM within a wider lifecycle framework. The development of a national WAM roadmap would robustly support a comprehensive approach.**

For example, marking and record-keeping are sometimes politically more sensitive, and logistically more challenging, but form the fundamental basis for effective WAM accounting systems and tracing mechanisms. As illustrated above, few post-conflict States in Africa have achieved much in this area due to technical difficulties, lack of resources and a general distrust among national security forces. National-level coordination and detailed planning of activities and international assistance are crucial to address this delay in implementing regional and international obligations.

A national WAM roadmap would allow national authorities to prioritize efforts and plan WAM activities in the short, medium and long terms, preventing duplication, particularly with regard to training interventions. It would also allow for a more strategic and coordinated approach to securing political buy-in to establish and maintain WAM systems, thereby addressing frustration with the ad hoc nature of activities, which was expressed by national participants during several of the consultations.

## 5.3 DEVELOPING NON-STATE-FOCUSED WAM TO MITIGATE ARMED VIOLENCE

The security situation in parts or across whole territories of African countries in conflict or early post-conflict, including the Central African Republic, the Niger and Somalia, do not meet the conditions for direct disarmament or weapons collections from non-State groups and individuals. **There is growing evidence that failing the removal of weapons, stronger efforts must be made to mitigate the impact of the wide availability of lethal materiel.**

National consultations highlighted that, in the absence of formal security provision in areas affected by armed violence and terrorism, disarmament efforts would not be well received or could even be harmful as they would leave the population defenceless. However, participants highlighted that weapons should at least be registered with the authorities and owners should submit a licence request, where national legislation provides for such options. In addition, in the case of Somalia, the baseline assessment underlined the need to support individuals and communities in better managing their weapons and ammunition in order to prevent accidents or armed violence. Suggestions included sensitization to the risks associated with keeping weapons and ammunition at home, awareness of safety and handling of firearms, and the simplification of regulations regarding weapons possession and use. Other measures might for example focus on introducing measures to delay access to weapons and ammunition by individuals in order to mitigate the threat of interpersonal violence. This could include rendering access to weapons and ammunition more difficult by securing the items in separate locations, keeping them in a lockable safe, or surrendering them to a single community body that stores them securely and manages access.

#### 5.4 SUPPORTING WAM EFFORTS IN NON-MISSION CONTEXTS

States in Africa that have hosted regional or international peace operations, particularly one managed by the United Nations or with a substantial WAM mandate and technical capacity, as well as those States under embargo, tend to have stronger WAM frameworks in place. United Nations missions attract a cohort of international donors and contractors with significant WAM capabilities that are critical to the development of national capacities. In these contexts, national authorities are more sensitized to international WAM guidelines and standards and are encouraged to ratify international and regional WAM instruments—aspects that tend to be missing in environments without support from such missions.

WAM in non-mission contexts, like the Niger, may be more challenging in terms of engaging international partners to provide assistance—logistical frameworks are more limited, less funding may be available, and technical field assessments to inform the design and identify entry points for programming are less likely to have been conducted. The legal basis for operating in these contexts is also less clear. **Establishing and implementing WAM systems in States that receive more limited support from the international community (including in non-mission contexts) can nevertheless strengthen efforts to secure materiel and prevent its diversion, and safely manage ammunition to mitigate the risk of unplanned explosions, particularly in those countries that have already experienced rebellion or civil war.** Many such countries are affected by growing intercommunal unrest or regional insecurity dynamics where a lack of control of national stockpiles may also fuel cross-border organized crime and terrorism, as has been the case in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Niger or Nigeria. **Further research is needed to help design WAM programming for such non-mission settings.**

#### 5.5 STRENGTHENING AMMUNITION MANAGEMENT

Management of ammunition, including explosives, beyond those for small arms, presents a unique hazard and set of challenges requiring greater technical skill, infrastructure and security safeguards than for weapons management systems generally. **Unsecured stockpiles of ammunition are an attractive source of materiel for non-State armed groups, including terrorists, which have been using ammunition for light and heavy weapons as sources for the main charge in improvised explosive devices, as seen in the Sahel, for example.** In addition, **most of the States that conducted WAM baseline assessments have suffered (for example, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, the Niger, Nigeria and Somalia) unplanned explosions at munitions sites, with the most lethal incident taking**

place in Nigeria in 2002 which killed more than 1,000 people and displaced over 20,000.<sup>30</sup> These incidents have resulted in increasing levels of interest from leaders in government and national security bodies in measures to safeguard ammunition and explosives through better stockpile management. Nevertheless, only limited measures have so far been implemented. For example, the baseline assessments indicated that most PSSM efforts focus only on weapons and small arms ammunition.

Ammunition storage facilities require specific safeguards, including safe distances from vulnerable buildings, civilian populations, and public transportation routes. Ammunition—specifically explosives—is a hazardous commodity that requires appropriate planning and management, including for handling, storage, transport, and selection and training of personnel in order to minimize the risks posed to populations by explosions that may occur as a result of negligence, accident or sabotage. Appropriate physical infrastructure and operational management of such strategic assets are also necessary to prevent the diversion of ammunition.

It is important to note that representatives of security forces who participated in the various consultations mentioned a number of recurring issues: 1) a lack of technical capacity to conduct surveillance of ammunition, which is fundamental to monitoring ammunition stability; 2) the need to manage unclassified ammunition, which may have been received from exporting States or recovered from security operations; 3) difficulty in identifying areas in which to build safe ammunition storage facilities in compliance with the IATG; and 4) a lack of resources and technical capacity to safely transport and destroy larger calibre obsolete or surplus ammunition. **These findings indicate that greater focus is needed on ammunition management in conflict-affected settings in order to prevent diversion as well as mitigate the risk of accidental explosions.**

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<sup>30</sup> Ney York Times, "Toll in Blast at Nigerian Armory Exceeds 1,000", 3 February 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/03/world/toll-in-blast-at-nigerian-armory-exceeds-1000.html>; World Health Organization, "Armoury Explosion In Lagos, Nigeria", <https://who.insomniation.com/news/armoury-explosion-lagos-nigeria>.

## 6 Conclusion

The rapid development of international regulatory frameworks, the building and implementation of technical standards, increased bilateral and multilateral funding, and the multiplication of international specialized contractors all reflect the fact that WAM has become a key component of international support to States transitioning from or affected by conflict. However, national-level consultations have shown that the impact of WAM efforts in the majority of States remains relatively modest. Two particular dynamics are crucial for the realization of the full potential of WAM in addressing and preventing conflict. First, while the implementation of baseline assessments by national authorities indicates a recognized need and a significant step towards creating a sound national WAM framework with a strong coordination mechanism, the ad hoc nature of WAM activities continues to lead to missed opportunities to maximize the impact of efforts at the strategic and operational levels. Second, the mandates of United Nations missions are increasingly prescriptive in terms of WAM provisions. Integrating WAM as a new pillar of United Nations support in violence-affected States presents a key practical entry point for a better integration of arms control into the conflict prevention and management agenda.



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# The role of weapon and ammunition management in preventing conflict and supporting security transitions

## Preliminary findings and key policy considerations

This paper presents preliminary findings on the role of weapon and ammunition management (WAM) in preventing conflict and supporting security transitions. The paper highlights observations from a series of national assessments on WAM frameworks conducted by States in cooperation with UNIDIR, with particular lessons drawn from four States in Africa—the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Niger and Somalia. The objective of this paper is to promote knowledge on key issues and processes relevant to WAM in transitional settings, and to provide policy considerations for strengthening the role of WAM in preventing and managing conflicts and reducing armed violence.